

BECOMING SANSKRIT
A STUDY OF LANGUAGE AND PERSON
IN THE ṚGVEDIC ĀRANYAKAS

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the topic of Sanskrit's cultural significance has become increasingly subject to discussion as its high visibility in the identity politics of the modern Indian nation has combined with a general questioning of philological methods to generate a demand for revised approaches to historiography and textual analysis. The resulting developments successfully demonstrate the potential of retrieving a wide diversity of previously unsought information from Sanskrit texts, utilising these findings to grapple with the identification of the language with closed models of cultural elitism, and thereby establish the foundation of a wider understanding of Sanskrit in historical context. What these developments do not address, however, is the matter of how the composition and reception of linguistic materials are influenced by culturally specific understandings of language that are not universally applicable across cultures, and may indeed be incompatible with those familiar to modern scholars and around which a number of leading hermeneutic approaches have been built.

This work argues, firstly, that the parameters currently ascribed to Sanskrit – the justifications of its specialised status, the focus on structure and style in definitions of genre, the treatment of revelation as static and non-subjective – are markedly narrower than those demonstrated in Vedic texts, and as such obscure the possibility of alternative phenomenological, language-based and non-elite explanations for Sanskrit's ongoing appeal in South Asian religious culture. Secondly, it contends that understandings of language, ancient and modern alike, implicate deeply embedded conceptions of the relationship between language and the human subject, particularly as relates to the formation and refinement of personal identity – a matter which draws revelation and embodiment together in the provision of a living context for self-transformation. These two considerations will be explored through a close examination of the R̥gvedic Āraṇyakas, since they provide an exemplary instance of the way that familiar approaches to Sanskrit must be adapted in accordance with the demands of texts if we are to

retrieve their internal integrity and thereby reach a deeper understanding of what it means to become *saṃskṛta*.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ṚV	<i>Ṛgveda Saṃhitā</i>
AitĀ	<i>Aitareya Āraṇyaka</i>
AitB	<i>Aitareya Brāhmaṇa</i>
AitU	<i>Aitareya Upaniṣad</i>
JB	<i>Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa</i>
KṣU	<i>Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad</i>
PB	<i>Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa</i>
PMS	<i>Pūrvamīmāṃsā Sūtra</i>
ŚāṅkhĀ	<i>Śāṅkhāyana Āraṇyaka</i>
TB	<i>Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa</i>
TS	<i>Taittirīya Saṃhitā</i>

INTRODUCTION

For reasons that have as much to do with India's classical śāstric expositions on language as with the expectations of recent scholarship, a particular vision of Sanskrit's social history has come to occupy prevailing depictions of its cultural significance. Under the influence of the gravity of language politics and identity in the modern Indian nation, the contours of this history are inevitably political. Moreover, to the extent that they have been filled in with themes, concerns, and vocabulary drawn from Sanskrit's textual traditions, these contours are now a driving force in the concomitant creation of historiographies of this language, its literature and employments, that are radically narrower in their scope than what the evidence itself suggests may have been the reality on the ground. Such, then, is the complexity that has been buried beneath the weight of recent leading, indeed, paradigm-shifting interpretations of Sanskrit as elite, a discourse unto itself: the primary evidence for Sanskrit's wider employments in religious and other practices is largely belied by the primary evidence for its self-representation. These representations – the themes, concerns, and vocabulary mentioned above – have been recognized and repeated by scholars, both Indological and indigenous, because they characterize the relationship between Sanskrit and other languages in a way that is nothing short of programmatic: they are crafted in accordance with the epistemological requirements of the Sanskritic intellectual culture that emerged around the turn of the Common Era, and they intentionally reinforce the axiomatic equation of Sanskrit with transcendent authority and the exclusively Brahmanical right to it.

When viewed from the vantage point of the present, these self-representations are easily mapped against the counter-arguments and non-Brahmanical voices that arise from within the broader, affiliation-neutral context of South Asian social and intellectual developments. As such, they are recast as

points of contestation stemming from the vested interests of the Brahmin elite with respect to the cultural and geographical distribution of their power, coterminous with the spread of Sanskrit's influence through the same overlapping domains. What is particularly interesting are the stakes involved in this modern characterization, for, rather than offsetting the literary representation of Sanskrit against its variegated employments both within and at the margins of Brahmanical practice, and in this way retrieving a wider picture of its understanding by indigenous participants, it is instead the literary representation that is retained and allowed to speak for Sanskrit as a whole. This raises the pertinent questions of whether the image of Sanskrit that is deployed by critical historiographers and other academics is a spectre or a reality, and of how this shapes the way texts are interpreted.

While the production of critical historiographies undoubtedly carries weight as a corrective to the role of scholarship in the reification of charged accounts of India's history, the practice of reigning in so-called traditionalist perspectives through the presentation of conflicting views should be seen as a method involving certain interpretative manoeuvres that cannot be explained without recourse to twentieth-century categories and dialectics. These do not share conceptual terrain with the cultural phenomena studied, and need, I believe, to be distinguished as such. Thus, the depiction that ensues of an equable historical situation, in which the value attributed to Sanskrit by native scholars is considered to bring the same instigating force to modern identity politics as to involvement in the ritual culture of the mid-Vedic period, depends largely upon the treatment of religion as an institution that enforces control through the repression of individuality with its own self-authenticating symbols and suggestive arrangements of knowledge. Such a retrieval of evidence in favour of a dialectical relationship between language and religion, addressed in Chapter 1, reconceives of Sanskrit in secular terms. Moreover, it locates new justifications for Sanskrit's enduring appeal by means of revisionist interpretations. In accordance with these interpretations and conceptualizations, the discourses that can be extracted from religious texts tend to be of central importance to the consolidation of modern critiques, but the internal or actual religious coherence

of the perspectives and practices they articulate is concomitantly eschewed. This disinclination is similarly expressed in the tendency to leave widespread dynamics in South Asian religious culture unaddressed, some of which, like the pan-Indic phenomenon of spirit and deity possession, permeate the boundaries that separate the elite from the “folk.” Following these considerations, it is apposite to question the way that a context for Brahmanism has been generated.

A common feature of many critical studies is their extrapolation of an origin for the exclusivity of the classical Sanskrit literary and intellectual traditions from the preoccupation with ritual minutiae and sacral restrictions that first appears in the Vedic revelatory texts of the first millennium BCE. It is of note that this theorists’ approach to recovering patterns of continuity sits at a marked distance from the philological methods utilized by Vedicists, under whose purview the specialized study of these ancient materials typically falls. Restated, the question of Sanskrit’s cultural significance, on one hand, and the texts that are specifically considered to focus this question against ideologies of ancient pedigree, on the other, are each aligned with starkly different lines of enquiry, methodological approval, and disciplinary affiliation within the realm of modern academic research.

Given these circumstances, in which the examination of the same group of materials yields differing results for the conceptualization of Sanskrit as a cultural phenomenon, Chapter 2 discusses the textual basis for current perspectives on developments in Brahmanical religious culture during the Vedic period. In this respect, attention is paid specifically to the matter of how the sources of these current perspectives implicate highly particular understandings of language and the influence of these upon textual analysis and its outcomes. Here, recent scholarship on the Ṛgvedic Āraṇyakas with their eclectic style and contents provides an exemplary instance of the way that attempts to reach definitions of genre can lead to a superimposition of modern ideas over the received form of texts, rupturing their internal integrity and occluding it from considered examination. This immediately raises the interpretative problematic of what adaptations would need to be made to our familiar approaches in order to prevent such patterns of coherence in the Ṛgvedic Āraṇyakas from becoming obscured.

These adaptations, discussed in the latter half of Chapter 2, touch on concerns such as orality and the sonic dimensions of texts, internal and external viewpoints regarding the experiential validity of language, and the very possibility of studying mystical statements. All of these implicate deeply embedded – and frequently unchallenged – preconceptions about the relationship between language and the person.

After these considerations of the way that such inherited, and primarily Western-influenced, models of language and its analysis can be traced behind the difficulties and limitations that are characteristic of the study of the *Āraṇyakas*, Chapter 3 attends to the Sanskrit texts themselves. These are examined in relation to the contention that they demonstrate a broader engagement with language than what can be accommodated by the parameters that are currently ascribed to Sanskrit. Following a postulation made in the preceding chapter, namely, that language is conceptualized in culturally specific ways because it is inseparable from cultural understandings of the body, I turn firstly to the phenomenon of embodiment as it appears in these texts – as a primordial archetype, as a context for soteriological practice and recurrent point of reference in revelatory teachings, and as an underlying implication of the *Ṛgvedic* *Āraṇyakas*' conservatively orthodox and ostensibly magical passages alike. In the attempt to consistently maintain this perspective throughout the various stages and dimensions involved in textual analysis – or, more precisely, to negotiate the challenge that is presented by the internal diversity of these texts – I implement a working methodology that is grounded in the principles of a polythetic approach. Hopefully, this allows the coherence of the texts' eclectic and chronologically diverse contents to be highlighted. In addition, this methodology also explores the advantages of a literal reading of Sanskrit passages; this permits the revelatory or ontologically veridical status of their statements to be maintained, as opposed to reconceived as literary strategies whose meaning is derived from external sources of importance. Without claiming freedom from the constraints of established academic paradigms, the flexibility of this approach facilitates a relatively easy adaptation of familiar methods to the demands of these *Āraṇyakas*' internal worldview. This is because it elucidates – and thereby helps to prevent the

importation of – interpretative problematics that originate from outside of the Vedic tradition and which run the risk of implicitly valorising or de-valorising the texts’ teachings regardless of the scholar’s intentions. At the very least, such an approach encourages self-reflexivity in the matter of one’s inherited assumptions and expectations, thus providing the necessary platform for critique, adaptation, and an arguably deeper engagement with the primary sources.

What emerges from this shift in the underlying terms of interpretation is a picture of personhood that transcends the divisions that modern scholars and native commentators alike have introduced into the interpretation of the Ṛgvedic Āraṇyakas. According to this picture, personhood is the vital state resulting from a collocation of diverse and shifting entities, referred to as deities (*devatā*) and including language and speech, that penetrate the boundaries of the corporeal body (*śarīra*). Thus pervading the body with the host of their respective functions and substantialities, the deities altogether give rise to the person (*puruṣa*) as a dynamic and composite identity that challenges the notion of individual autonomy and reveals a vulnerability that follows on the heels of the openness to transaction, the introduction of external elements into personal constitution, and the fundamental changes of state these herald. Although lacking here is an exact lexical equivalent to “embodiment,” the Sanskrit vocabulary that is employed to describe the movement of deities into and out of the body shares substantial links with the phenomenon of possession. By virtue of thus opening textual interpretation to directions suggested by anthropological and ethnographic research, this lexicon provides the concept of the deities’ movement and contributions with a precision that draws attention to the *puruṣa* in its capacity as the immediate context of soteriological transformations.

While indicating a marked break with the normative Vedāntic equation of the *ātman* and *brahman* that is characteristic of the commentarial tradition associated with the Upaniṣads of the Ṛgvedic Āraṇyakas, the positive emphasis placed on the *puruṣa* as an embodiment of the deities suggests not only that language is literally established in the body, but that qualities introduced through language significantly affect changes within the composition of personhood. Saliently, this includes both the experience of subjectivity and its expression. The

implications of these cultural understandings for the understanding of Vedic revelations are discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, with particular focus on the entry of Sanskrit into the body and its repercussions for the personal attainment of a textually-specified identity. Given the tendency to define the Upaniṣads over against the Brāhmaṇas and Āraṇyakas through reference to an increased inwardness of focus and commensurate disinvestment in sensory experience, the physicality of knowledge suggested by the Ṛgvedic Āraṇyakas' model of the *puruṣa* and the reconfigurations of identity it informs form an essential component of the discussion in Chapter 3.

The openness of embodiment, the composite nature of personhood, the role of the deities as external forces, and the connection between the hidden and visible dimensions of reality all point to the need for an expanded notion of revelation and must be considered together as a functioning whole in accordance with their depiction in these texts. Chapter 4 presses this model of a creative intersection between the *puruṣa* and external forces into the service of *śruti*, Vedic revelation, which is examined in the sense of a disclosure of truth via an heightened or modified use of language, taking into account both the full diversity of these Āraṇyakas' contents and the additional considerations that are introduced by the oral culture of Vedic transmission and study. It is in this connection that *bandhus*, a prominent feature of the Ṛgvedic Āraṇyakas, come into their own as an employment of language that is dynamic, creative, and affective. Despite the ubiquity of their utilization in Vedic texts, scholarly disagreement over how *bandhus* function generally and thence ought to be interpreted has led to their being adduced as evidence of three conceptually isolated, and even conflicting, spheres or stages within Brahmanical religious culture, namely, sacrificial ritual, mystical realization, and magical rites. In an attempt to retrieve the underlying cohesiveness of *bandhus*, Chapter 4 examines the suggestion that it is the numerous dynamic processes of grammar that give language its generative force and in this attest to the veridical nature of hidden connections by bringing them, and the truth of identity, into perceivable existence.

As with the employment of a polythetic approach, this examination responds to the contention that the parameters currently assigned to Sanskrit need

to be expanded if they are to accommodate the employment of language demonstrated by these texts. To the extent that grammar is arguably both cultural and cosmological, and not merely an arbitrary system of reference, it is especially suited to the expression of the subtly manifest connections that underscore identity and whose discernment is a leading preoccupation of Vedic tradition generally. As such, it allows the “magical” creativity of language to be addressed without its discussion being hindered by either the pejorative overtones or the complex attempts at justification that beleaguer much scholarship on magic, and at the same time makes it unnecessary to resort to a default analysis of signs, symbols, and referential associations.

These considerations raise the germane question of whether it is viable to suggest the existence of a complement between magic and revelation, the interpretative extremes between which the internal coherence of these texts has most often become fragmented. To this end, Chapter 4 turns to a close survey of passages taken from across the *Aitareya* and *Śāṅkhāyana* texts that suggest grammar is the coded substance that language contributes to the *puruṣa*. If this reading is accurate, and I argue that it is, then the movements of grammar can be interpreted in accordance with the vision of open and permeable embodiment that is at once the basis of the subject’s vulnerability to the influences of their environment and the prerequisite to soteriological transformation. It comes as no surprise that the grammatical reordering of the *puruṣa*’s interior structures is most visible in passages that address either revelation (*saṃhitā*) and the aim of putting oneself together (*sam-√dhā*), or the rites used to protect against harm by endowing the subject with the power of speech. A comparison of these passages, their claims and injunctions, indicates that self-cultivation and self-preservation are part and parcel of the *Āraṇyaka*s’ worldview, wherein the constantly shifting grounds of personhood have soteriological repercussions both before and after death. Furthermore, the common locus these passages share with accounts of creation – which detail the god Prajāpati’s collapse and subsequent reintegration through *saṃhitā* – identify these mutual imperatives with the pre-existent tensions and relationships threaded throughout the cosmos. At the same time, they suggest

an extension of revelation to worldly practices that have generally been excluded from conservative assessments of Vedic practice.

This movement away from the treatment of language as a referential scheme, to the treatment of it instead as a sensorily perceived phenomenon whose meaningfulness arises from multiple active – and primarily ineffable – internal phenomena, introduces a certain conceptual elasticity into the way that revelation is contextualised. Firstly, it begs a re-evaluation of *saṃhitā* in light of the evidence for the involvement of human subjectivity in the unfolding disclosure and personal realization of truth. Secondly, the cultural contours of embodiment finally suggest new directions in the study of Sanskrit and necessitate a reconsideration of the employment of *sam-√kr̥* and its derivatives in relation to the substantial contributions made by language to the reshaping of personal identity. As shall be seen, this occurs particularly through the intentional and heavily ritualized introduction of revelation into one's person. To the extent that the occurrences of *sam-√kr̥* all point to a processual continuity between the cultivation of the identity and the evolution of the cosmos – not to mention the integral place of language in both – the discussion of what it means to become *saṃskṛta* opens the way to an analysis to some of the most challenging, for ostensible unorthodox, rites detailed in these texts.

The final chapter draws out some extended conclusions and implications for the understanding of Vedic revelation and Brahmanical practice and the further study of these and other South Asian texts; it also identifies a few more questions and difficulties that at present constrain the study of the *Āraṇyakas* as a formal corpus. First, I return to the matter of language as a phenomenon whose employments accord with the basic assumptions that underpin the given worldview of those who engage with it. Because these perspectives have practical repercussions for textual interpretation, they increase in gravity with respect to revelation, in which instance language must attune fundamentally to the reality disclosed if it is to truly bear witness to the existence claims made therein. As this observation obtains specifically in the teachings and practice of the *Ṛgvedic Āraṇyakas*, it suggests – or, indeed, demands – a model of subjectivity that differs significantly from the one at play in classical Sanskrit discourses on the self, but

which nonetheless reveals a point of undeniable consistency throughout these texts.

Such divergence with the methods and findings of established scholarship does not, however, set back our understandings of early Brahmanical culture, but rather opens it to directions that promise comprehensiveness and the type of thick descriptions that cannot be found in the primary texts themselves. This is particularly evident in the relevance of subjectivity to the question of what precisely is involved in the Brahmanical emphasis on self-control, an emphasis that is documented both textually and ethnographically, but which extends beyond the conservative parameters that characterize śāstric injunctions on personal conduct. By thus casting light back onto a tradition that has long been locked within the sacrificial enclosure, these observations have immediate repercussions for the textuality of the R̥gvedic Āraṇyakas, in particular, by elucidating the dangers inherent in the impact of revelation upon subjectivity and in this way drawing attention to the substance behind the restrictions on the performance of the texts. Without overturning the philological methods traditionally utilized in the study of the Veda, this suggestion of the close proximity between theory and practice, revelatory claim and transformative experience, is a practical addition to scholarly understanding that should facilitate further developments in the study of Vedic revelation in the broader context of South Asian religious culture.

A note on the structure of this work is in order. Given the fact that the difficulties involved in the question of Sanskrit's cultural significance result equally from the challenging nature of the primary sources and from the peculiar tendencies of modern scholarship, this examination moves continually between discussions of theory and close observations of the texts themselves. The sheer amount of space thus dedicated to questions of an highly contemporary and theoretical nature may seem out of place in a study centring on the literary analysis of ancient materials, and certainly parts ways with the more usual approaches taken in the study of the Veda. Nonetheless, it is justified by the need to more clearly see our own influences in creating depictions of Sanskrit's

megalithic authority and likewise in the absence of research into its active role in processes of self-transformation.

Secondly, a comment on translation and the editions employed in this study. While the passages presented may appear irregular in their shifting back and forth between the two *Āraṇyakas* of the *Ṛgveda* – and likewise between the genres of *Āraṇyaka* and *Upaniṣad* – this movement is informed by the argument that these texts need to be considered as wholes, in accordance with the form of their transmission. If we are to gain any sense of the internal continuity of these *Āraṇyakas*, then such a prioritization of their transmitted form over the classification of their contents in accordance with pre-given categories is a basic prerequisite of a more comprehensive approach to examination. This marks a particular type of orientation to their composite nature, and not a disregard for the differing chronological strata of the materials from which they have been compiled. In response to the relatively unknown status of the *Āraṇyakas* and the lack of recent scholarly editions, I provide the Sanskrit text and English translations in parallel. Hopefully, this is more of an help to understanding than an hindrance to reading.

With respect to editions, the materials available provide a good starting point for the study of the *Ṛgvedic Āraṇyakas*, but are characteristically unreliable and leave much to be desired. In the case of the *Aitareya Āraṇyaka*, the edition and translation prepared by Arthur Berridale Keith remains a major resource despite the evidence that suggests his unnecessary “correction” of the reading of the text gleaned from manuscripts; in many cases, such suspected interference is confirmed through comparison with the earlier edition produced by Bābāśāstrī Phadke, which is also helpful in its presentation of Sāyaṇa’s interlinear commentary. If Keith’s translation of the *Aitareya* is notable for his occasional insertion of words and suggested meanings that are not attested in the Sanskrit and irregular ascription of value to lexical items, thus deadening the subtle progressions that are evident in the text, it is nonetheless a far healthier specimen than his translation of the *Śāṅkhāyana Āraṇyaka*. With respect to the latter, the quality of the translation is entirely summarized in Keith’s own statement that the text is “not of special importance” and that it is important to “observe some

proportion between the effort expended and the value of the result.”¹ While I have not been able to locate any other translations of the *Śāṅkhāyana*, the edition produced by Śrīdhara Śāstrī Pāṭhak is an invaluable resource for the study of this text and is on the whole far less subject to orthographic errors than the more recent edition by Bhim Dev. Given the very high degree of inconsistency demonstrated by the manuscripts of both the *Śāṅkhāyana Āraṇyaka* and the *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad* which it contains, it comes as no surprise to find some variation between the numbering of passages given by these editions and Keith’s translation; where relevant, these differences have been given in the footnotes.

Finally, as is characteristic of all such Vedic texts, the *Aitareya* and *Śāṅkhāyana* contain a large proportion of material cited from the *Ṛgveda Saṃhitā*; they also each contain Upaniṣads that are better known as independent texts and which have their own traditions of transmission and commentary. When the *Āraṇyaka* indicates that a certain number of verses in a hymn are to be recited in full, I provide the expanded text of the recitation from the *Ṛgveda*; this practice not only conveniences the reader, but is necessary if we are to see the continuity and interplay between these recitations and the teachings of the *Āraṇyaka*. In such cases, I refer to the Sanskrit text of the *Ṛgveda Saṃhitā* prepared by Van Nooten and Holland. In the majority of instances, however, it is apparent that it is the abbreviated form of the citation itself that is intended by the *Āraṇyaka* and built upon in the surrounding text; here, I translate in accordance with the citation in its given form, resisting the larger grammatical context provided by its original positioning in a *Ṛgvedic* verse. Similarly, I follow the text of the Upaniṣads as it is given by their corresponding *Āraṇyakas*, that is, without the numbering of passages that is typical in translations and editions of the *Aitareya* and *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣads* but which is not a feature of either the *Aitareya* or *Śāṅkhāyana Āraṇyakas*. Only where indicated do I follow the translations of the *Ṛgveda* by Joel Brereton and Stephanie Jamison and of the *Aitareya* and *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣads* by Patrick Olivelle; in all other cases, the translations are my own.

¹ Keith 1908: v.

CHAPTER ONE

Looking for a Language Named Sanskrit

As a source of information and a driving force behind developments in interpretative method, language has long occupied a determinative position in the study of Indian culture. While factors such as a vast premodern literary tradition with an influence extending across Asia and the overwhelmingly textual nature of the evidence for India's ancient period contribute objectively to these circumstances, the appeal of language as a focus of study is often motivated by the intersection between linguistic and political identities and the peculiar reflexivity of postcolonial South Asia's role in the evolution of modern academic ethics and expectations. It is in light of the latter that the marked distinction between the fact of India's immense linguistic diversity and the almost exclusive dominance of Sanskrit literary culture comes into view not as a specialized occurrence but rather as a situation of extreme incongruence informed – and even enforced – by the social agenda of those in power. Although ardent versions of this perspective often stem from outside of the disciplinary interchanges that are relatively conventional within the overarching category of Indology, and may even be seen as belonging to broadly discrete academic disciplines and arrangements of knowledge such as political science or area studies in their concern with highly modernist and political frameworks, a somewhat more moderate articulation of the same is often felt in the automatic equation of Sanskrit texts and language with the narrowly conservative interests of the Brahmanical intellectual elite. And while this equation has been criticised for an over-reliance on śāstric literature that reduces the activity of the Brahmins' to textual exegesis by ignoring alternative texts and complementary data from other fields, thereby setting the stage for its own failure to produce a non-elitist reading

of classical Indian religion,² it is of equal significance that such opposition has not been extended to the question of how a reconsideration of Brahmanical religious culture should inspire a corresponding reconsideration of Sanskrit's cultural significance.

Although the increasing utilization of cross-disciplinary findings responds positively to criticisms that have been levelled at the truncating disjunctures that can arise from an examination of textual data alone, I posit that what has been less commonly addressed is the matter of how our very understanding of language shapes the reception and subsequent study of linguistic materials. In the words of Greg Bailey's incisive assessment of practices of textual analysis in contemporary Indology, "the relationship between the contents of the texts and the use made of those contents is necessarily an arbitrary one which can and has been determined by factors sometimes having little relation to the objects of investigation themselves."³ Assuming for a moment the viability of suggesting that it is the granted status of language – its a priori familiarity as a medium of critical analysis, and acceptance as a biological universal of human communication – that prevents scholars from making further enquiries into the culturally understood network of interactions that frame linguistic activities, then the fact that arguments for the inescapability of the sensory dimensions of language have not motivated a reinvestigation of Sanskrit's meaningfulness *vis à vis* Vedic models of embodiment mark a serious oversight in the study of ancient Brahmanical texts. If understandings of language implicate understandings of the body, of whatever constitutes a natural relationship between an individual's cognitive and physiological functions, on one hand, and self-expression through the pre-existing structures of grammar and poetics, on the other, then it is imperative to ask in which ways our prevailing interpretative paradigms might be flexibly adapted to better accommodate the emic perspectives underpinning Sanskrit's revelatory force.

Without arguing for the superiority of any one hermeneutic paradigm, this chapter examines some of the leading conceptualizations of language, culture, and

² White 2003: 3.

³ Bailey 1995: 15.

identity at play in contemporary Indology and raises the question of what has been involved in defining Sanskrit, what has been excluded, and at what cost. Restated, these concerns point to the larger complexity of how modern scholars have understood Sanskrit to exist in the world, as a phenomenon, especially with respect to the way its status as a religious language undergoes critical transformations in light of the doubts cast over the validity of experience as an interpretative framework and the treatment of religion as an institution of questionable relevance to reality on the ground. In order to comprehend the scholarly retrieval of Sanskrit's cultural significance, then, we need firstly to note that the important questions occupying recent scholarship are those that address its employment as an historically situated practice: a matter of how people have engaged with the language and its texts, expressing identity through literature at the same time as encoding it as a pre-existing cultural system, and the way that this informs potentially convertible notions of tradition. As shall be seen, this bears upon the very use of the name "Sanskrit" and its value-laden reverberations, in both practice and theory, through the historical process referred to as Sanskritization.⁴ In this connection, it is also imperative to raise the spectral matter of language's ontology and the implications of its absence from both revisionist histories of Sanskritic culture and philological analyses of Vedic texts themselves. While the latter and its influence on the creation of definitions form the major focus of the next chapter, the secularization of Sanskrit is necessarily addressed here, in the context of how scholars have attempted to locate attributes and associations that would account for its literary and cultural profile.

To this end, we begin with the dialectics involved in the identification of Sanskrit and Brahmanism, considering the historical basis of this identification and its invocation in response to the conflict that has become synonymous with religious nationalism and identity politics in the Indian nation. These characterizations of Brahmanical culture are not only literary – being drawn from Sanskrit texts, vocabulary, and themes, and shaped to fit the paradigms of modern literary criticism – but are self-reflexively so, caught in a feedback loop in which standing notions of Brahmanical social agenda cast a shadow on the primary texts

⁴ Charsley 1998.

from which such notions are ostensibly extrapolated. We then turn to sociolinguistic perspectives, and discuss the authoritative materials adduced in the effort to account for the circumstances surrounding the diglossic binary between Sanskrit and Prakrit as reflected not only in the grammatical and poetic, but also epigraphic traditions. These considerations of what is taken to constitute authoritative evidence, alongside the scholarly renegotiation of traditional claims for Vedic infallibility, lead us to an examination of the wider impacts of the modern intellectual secularization of language on our understanding of middle to late Vedic social developments, particularly the rejection of Sanskrit by the early Buddhist and Jain communities as an impetus behind the increasingly conservative demands of orthodox Brahmanism. Following this, we conclude with some final reflections on how the inclusion of materials and cultural considerations that typically go unaddressed have the potential to expand the parameters currently assigned to Sanskrit in historical perspective.

The Language of the Gods

Until relatively recently, the study of Sanskrit by Western-trained scholars has been characterized by the internal division of the vast and diverse array of texts composed in the language into smaller areas of specialization in accordance with considerations such as chronology, textual typology or genre, affiliation, and discipline. While altogether these studies generate a comprehensive picture of the language and its materials, a lack of intra-disciplinary dialogue within the philology-based tradition of Indology has allowed certain dimensions of Sanskrit's broader history as a cultural phenomenon to go largely unaddressed until now. One of these – called by Renou “*le grande paradoxe linguistique de l'Inde*”⁵ – is the fact that, after being almost entirely absent from the epigraphic record for the first three centuries of literacy in India, Sanskrit exploded onto the cultural scene as a fully-fledged literary language, a mode of non-sacral employment for which no earlier evidence exists. The detailed examination of

⁵ Renou 1956: 84.

this issue, which has arguably become influenced by the particulars of Sheldon Pollock’s approach to literary criticism, identifies two momentous transformations in the structural formation of culture and power in premodern India and asks how “newness entered the world” in each of the historical events examined, namely, the reinvention of Sanskrit from a highly restricted sacred language to “a code for literary and political expression” around the turn of the Common Era, and its challenging and eventual displacement by the raising of local dialects to languages of poetry and polity in the early centuries of the second millennium.⁶ Such critique of the dialectical relationship between poetics and politics, *kāvya* and *rājya*, appropriates the theory of Sanskritization from its origin in the fieldwork-based practice of social anthropology for the purposes of an historical reconstruction that instead relies heavily upon modernist themes, especially as respond to the event of European vernacularisation, in a marked shift of emphasis away from the close documentation of empirical materials.⁷ In another development of the concept as it was first outlined in the works of M. N. Srinivas, Pollock’s approach also moves from the treatment of Sanskritization as a confluence of historical processes that were, and are, by no means strictly identified with Brahmins, to a theoretical framing of Sanskrit in history as a secular institution.⁸ This relocation of cultural significance, or attempt to retrieve such significance in isolation from cultural understandings of language’s metaphysical dimensions, resonates with a broader tendency toward secularization and the mainstream abandonment of questions of ontology in academic studies of language outside of theology. It is possible to ask, however, whether a theory of Sanskrit based in the twin characteristics of ritualization and discursive monopolization can realistically produce a comprehensive and balanced history of the same when undertaken in isolation from the study of South Asia’s religious culture.⁹

⁶ Pollock 2006: 1; also 2003, 2005. See Bronner, Cox, and McCrea eds. 2011; Gould 2008; Hatcher 2007.

⁷ Pollock (2006: 33) criticizes “philology in general and Indology in particular” for the failure to engage theory as part of the examination of empirical materials.

⁸ Srinivas 2002: 200-235; also Charsley 1998.

⁹ Pollock 2006: 39-40.

Considered from the vantage of the present, the formal edifice known as Sanskritic tradition stands in contrast to, though not in isolation from, the astonishing diversity of languages, texts, and practices that account for the major part of South Asia's ambient cultural environment. As such, the aesthetic and intellectual commitments – or constraints – that are identified with the employment of Sanskrit are now treated by many as a control against which to critique the accuracy of both traditional and traditionalist depictions, emic and etic alike, of an authoritative Sanskritic monoculture. Whilst thus becoming a point of intellectual debate with a seemingly unavoidable political thrust, the attempt to piece together a neutral picture of Sanskrit in context has opened the doors to new directions in scholarship that benefit from increasing levels of cross-disciplinary interaction, brought into dialogue with both classical Sanskritic discourse on language and non-classical evidence of other modes of practice. If, however, a prerequisite feature of most such studies is their renegotiation of the place of Brahmin intellectuals in the creation of a cultural hegemony composed in Sanskrit and founded upon its formidable pedigree, then the question that immediately arises is one of how the religious status of this language is interpreted and engaged with, firstly, in light of its larger equation with the self-interests and ideologies of those socially privileged by *varṇa*; secondly, as inseparable from procedures of textual analysis; and thirdly, with respect to its relationship to a far broader set of concerns and practices than those encompassed within the parameters of classical orthodox culture.

The evidence that provides the historical backdrop to this equation and brings the issue of Brahmanical involvement into full view is so well known as to not require detailed recounting here, but may rather be summarized as a matter of mutual exclusivity and self-limitation: as the right to engage in *yajña* was coterminous with the right to study the hymns, let alone the language, from which *yajña* was considered fundamentally inseparable, the Vedic texts establish the nucleus of what has become a persistent link between intellectual authority, Sanskrit, and the control of knowledge. Discussing the orthodox Brahmanical stratification of society into *varṇas*, the four-tiered hierarchy for which the indigenous tradition locates a cosmological origin in the form of the *Puruṣasūkta*

(*Rgveda* [RV] 10.90), but for which the opposite order of historical precedence may be nearer the case,¹⁰ Brian K. Smith presents the critical view succinctly:

a classification system like that of *varṇa* is ultimately the invention of a specific group of people whose power and privilege were in part based on their very ability to “seize the enunciative function” (as Michel Foucault might say) and expatiate on how the universe is organized. But more than this, since human beings are themselves inevitably implicated in their own classificatory schemes, those who generated the categorical system also placed themselves in an advantageous position within it. I assume, in other words, a social and political dimension to a classificatory system which is presented as pure knowledge.¹¹

Thus the concern with the programmatic perfection of *yajña* extends fully and paradigmatically through these associations and demonstrates clearly a set of relationships which spiral between the sacred and the social, entangling matters of perspective as they go: *varṇa* is an ontological reality revealed in the Veda and can only be truly known by one who has a deep understanding of Vedic language, which, now according to the exclusivism encoded in *varṇa*, means only by a Brahmin. Given the circularity of the orthodox claim for Vedic infallibility in contrast with the empirically retrievable impacts of caste on social equality, *varṇa* is attributed neither intrinsic nor extrinsic validity, but rather acquires significance within the socio-political sphere where it is subject to modern notions of rationality and sits radically, unnegotiably at odds with contemporary ethical standards. Herein, the association between religion and hierarchy is conceived of as an invention playing into the distribution of power and influence in society while the converse association between hierarchy and religion is seen to reinforce the elitism, and even artificiality, of *yajña*. This allows traditional religious materials that draw upon or otherwise anticipate the authenticity of Brahmanical formulations to be readily interpreted as heading toward a single, secular goal.¹²

Setting aside for a moment the question of the internal validity of a correlation between Sanskrit and cultural power, its outward appearance as a

¹⁰ See discussion of the interpretation of this hymn in Brereton and Jamison 2014: 1538 (vol. 3).

¹¹ B. Smith 1994: 4.

¹² For example, see Heesterman 1985 and 1993; also Houben 2004: 385-393

contested ideology is strongly suggested by the fact that when alternative voices do begin to emerge in the historical record, around the 5th century BCE, they are voices of social and metaphysical dissent speaking Middle Indo-Aryan languages in the public domain, thus forwarding an argument against the Brahmins' closed ritual world that is simultaneously and substantially an argument against the metaphysical underpinnings of the Vedic language itself. As the stark contrasts perceived in this differing employment of language cannot be separated from the presumed interactions between religious figures, such as priests and ascetics, and the wider community, a picture of the sociality of Sanskrit appears in which its monopolization of the ritual domain is matched by its isolation from the real world of ordinary human experience. Following this, the question of a relationship between the interests that occupy the priestly texts of the Vedic canon and the culture of the period has more often than not been answered in the negative; these texts, it appears, like their later śāstric counterparts, are not in a position to give reliable insights into the way that people perceived their world.¹³ While the issue of these late Vedic disagreements and the possibilities of a different interpretation is returned to below, it also needs to be noted here that to the further extent that the later Brahmanical traditions position the Vedic language as eternally and incontrovertibly independent of human activity, Sanskrit's sacred and social roles in history become quite tidily conflated. More precisely, at the same time as the early sacerdotal culture of Sanskrit is identified as the backdrop to its later emergence into the public spheres of literature and the aestheticization of political power, a binary interplay between *laukika* and *alaukika*, this-worldly and other-worldly, comes to retrospectively delineate the interpretative parameters surrounding the Vedic revelation.

Literature, Religion, and Politics

In its recreation as a scholarly category, Sanskrit has been structured along secular lines in an approach that generates a profile restricted to what can be mapped through historical analysis, and in doing so implicates certain

¹³ Pollock 2006: 49-50; Deshpande 1993.

understandings of what is meaningful about the human relationship to language. Although in keeping with broader hermeneutic developments in the modern approach to linguistic analysis (discussed below in relation to sociolinguistics), this has the effect of making its cultural significance available to examination in isolation from its religious coherence – and creates a challenging interpretative scenario in which the success of attempts to undermine the authoritative self-representations of Sanskrit literary culture depend in large degree upon the very reinforcement of its religious gravitas. Put otherwise, rather than producing information that pushes toward a reconsideration of Sanskrit’s elitism by tempering the epistemological desiderata of Sanskritic intellectualism against its employment in a variety of non-elite practices, these depictions simultaneously reify the elite status of the language and bring its integrity into question as a phenomenon involved in the establishment and enforcement of human inequality. This is particularly evidenced in hard-line critiques of Sanskrit from the perspective of religious nationalism and identity politics in the events of the modern Indian nation. An exemplary instance of this approach is offered by Robert King, who asserts:

[There is] a significant fact about language on the subcontinent that enlarges its role as mischief maker in south Asia. What is alluded to here is what one might call the spiritual importance of language in South Asia...

There is hardly any force in human society more tricky than religion. If language is perceived in folk consciousness to be “endowed with religious purpose,” then language becomes a force that touches people in secret and dangerous places. This quasi-religious role of language easily turns what could be a rational, unemotional discussion about, say, whether newly independent India should be divided into linguistic states into a bitter, protracted, and tormented struggle.¹⁴

Despite the explicitly modern tenor of the conflict identified, King connects these observations on modern South Asian language politics to a far older phenomenon that he describes as Aryanization, or the “imposition of the Sanskrit language and Aryan religious and cultural practices [carried] out through the use of Sanskrit

¹⁴ King 2008: 313.

and Prakrit rather than the local dialect.”¹⁵ Although not offering detailed information about his sources, King’s reference to “religious and cultural practices” seems to point beyond the canonical languages associated with the dissemination of Brahmanism, Buddhism, and Jainism, as also the formalization of traditions of Hinduism, to a linguistic classification established by the early thinkers of the grammatical and exegetical traditions, in which Sanskrit and Prakrit are positioned as the opposite poles of a linguistic spectrum arranged around the capacity of language to activate or reveal *dharma* in the context of ritual activity.¹⁶ By the turn of the Common Era, this classification had commenced upon the track to its literary apotheosis as a formal typology of the few languages in which *kāvya* could be produced, and the Sanskrit imaginaire thereby participated in.¹⁷ From the point of view of the modern commonsense assumption of a universal poetic potential and right to literary participation, the restriction around *kāvya* registers as an ethical aberration in its non-recognition and nullification of the participatory status of both the developing vernacular traditions and the non-dramatic Prakrits, namely, Pali and Ardhamāgadhī.¹⁸

Although it is not difficult to see how the alternatively validating and proscriptive outcomes of these traditional classifications of language appear to bear traces of an embedded Vedic episteme, King’s assessment merges the anthropological categories of elite and folk in its correlation of Sanskritic discourses with what it depicts as an irrational sentimentality surrounding language in the modern South Asian populace generally. Rather than pointing to Sanskrit’s inflammatory role as a tool of exclusion, King implies that inherited religious views of language have been extended to modern linguistic groups and

¹⁵ Ibid.: 314.

¹⁶ See the introduction to Patañjali’s *Mahābhāṣya*, *Paspaśā* 12-13 (Bhattacharyya 1991); also Jaimini’s *Pūrvamīmāṃsāsūtra* 1.1.5 (Jha 1916) and 2.1.1 with Śabara’s commentary (Josi 1971-80).

¹⁷ I follow the discussion of ‘imaginaire’ in Collins 1998: 73-78. For examples of formal classifications of language in the early tradition of *Alaṅkāraśāstra*, I refer the reader to the typologies by Daṇḍin, *Kāvyaḍarśa* 1.32-38 (Belvakar and Raddi 1920) and Dhanamjaya, *Daśarūpa* 2.97-99ab (Haas 1962). Bhāmaha’s classification is paradigmatic of the early Sanskrit poetic tradition; see *Kāvyaḍalaṅkāra* 1.16: *śabdārthau sahītau kāvyaṃ gadyaṃ padyaṃ ca tad dvidhā / saṃskṛtaṃ prākṛtaṃ cānyad apabhraṃśa iti tridhā* // Reproduced from Rama Sastri 1956.

¹⁸ Pollock 2006: 64: “When the Sanskrit theoreticians inform us that *kāvya* is composed in three languages, they mean what they say: three languages alone are fit for literary expression, and others are not.”

are thereby more than superficially involved in the ongoing conflict that surrounds the question of what authentically constitutes Indian identity. With respect to working assumptions, this interpretation implicates a highly specific notion of language that privileges its modern conceptualization, foremost as an arbitrary referential system and medium of communication, whose ideal practical employment is rational to the degree of transcending any relation to a socially delimited identity and, at the very least, is treated as prospectively and universally value-neutral – an attainment which would place communication beyond either ideological distortion or deformation through the exercise of power.¹⁹

A defining feature of Sanskrit to its critical observers is the appropriation of texts and vocabulary in what Viswesaran et. al. describe as “the construction of a history that renders India as “Hindu,” and collapses the distinction between history and religious myth.”²⁰ While many of the events and reforms related to this historicist reinvention of India’s past have been sufficiently dramatic to capture attention globally, a number of scholars have drawn focus to the insidious dimensions of political sectarianism inspired by *hindutva* – “Hindu-ness” – the central ideology of the Sangh Parivar, or collective of Hindu nationalist organizations (a point that may be illustrated by these modern Sanskritizations themselves). In the words of Nandini Sundar: “The Sangh’s appeal lies in its ability to conceal its own warped and petty version of Hinduism within Hindu culture at large.”²¹ With respect to this picture of a manipulation of Indian identity achieved through education reforms centred in the rewriting of curricula and introduction of state-level policies disfavouring the subcontinent’s heterogeneous Muslim, Christian, and *ādivāsī* (indigenous) communities, Sanskrit is now instrumental to a “language heist” – to paraphrase Arundhati Roy – that marginalises all who do not fit the Sangh Parivar’s vision of Aryan origins.²² To the extent that such deployment of the language correlates with the tendency of political secularism to “institute a social and political grammar that works against the flourishing of precisely those forms of religion that should be preferred by all

¹⁹ J. Thompson 1981: 182-213.

²⁰ Visweswaran et. al. 2009: 103.

²¹ Sundar 2004: 1611.

²² Roy 2009: 37.

who oppose communal strife and religion-based varieties of violence and injustice,” Sanskrit’s modern role in the suppression of religious freedom and positive inter-faith dialogue is clear.²³

If this entanglement in current religious affairs can make the issue of Sanskrit’s documentation and analysis relatively straightforward for those with a focus on modern political ideologies, for Sanskritists and scholars of the history of religion it can equate to an inherent collision of perspectives that raises the predicament of how – and whether – to respond.²⁴ In a discussion of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the text that has arguably received the greatest attention as a source of Hindu nationalist appropriation following its role as a legitimizing symbol in the events leading up to the anti-Muslim riots that swept across India from December 1992 to January 1993, Pollock has stated that it “not easy...to sustain a claim for literary-critical or historiographical intervention in the face of problems that are not, in fact, literary critical or historiographical but something else... One should think that our target should be the “denunciation-text” rather than the object-text to which the former refers by what are often most tenuous representations.”²⁵ He continues:

If the grand *Rāmāyaṇa* continues to be a language of mythopolitics – not because it is inherently such a language but because there is now a history of its doing that specific symbolic work – available for encoding the pained forces of xenophobia and theocracy, one way to begin to neutralize those forces is through analysis of the construction and function of such a meaning system, and of its contemporary redeployment.²⁶

The response described here is characterised by a broadening of focus, from the internalist study of texts as autonomous contexts, to the study of texts through the history of their representation and appropriation over time and in connection to modes of expression that empower and disempower alternately. Because this “new kind of historical understanding and genealogy of Sanskrit”²⁷ sees the

²³ Sikka 2012: 289.

²⁴ For a comprehensive outline of the various terms and dimensions of this conflict, see Nussbaum 2007: 211-263.

²⁵ Pollock 2003b: 292.

²⁶ Ibid.: 293.

²⁷ Dirks 2011: xiii; Gould 2008; cf. F. Smith 2006b and Gellner 2008.

desacralization of the language as prerequisite to the formation of a Sanskrit cosmopolis – i.e., the premodern Sanskrit imaginaire in its geopolitical dimensions – such interpretations build primarily upon *kāvya* and the aestheticization of power, and pay little attention to the spread of soteriological practices and perspectives that give Sanskrit another kind of ontological value and cultural appeal.²⁸

In Simona Sawhney’s literary critical study *The Modernity of Sanskrit*, the author’s focus on the play of such aesthetics in events driven by religion-nationalist agenda, in particular, the devastating violence that hallmarked the destruction of the sixteenth-century Babrī Masjid in the Ram Janma Bhoomi (“Birth-ground of Ram”) conflict, and the framing of such events as a reclamation of the utopian Ayodhyā, leads her to the observation that “nothing has been so detrimental to the life of Sanskrit literature in our times as the appropriation of the Sanskrit tradition by Hindu nationalists.”²⁹ In this respect, however, Sawhney takes a harder line than others, asserting that this appropriation should be seen as nothing more than a “reinstatement of Sanskrit as the mark of orthodoxy” because “as we know, Sanskrit has always carried the stamp of orthodoxy; it might be more appropriate to say that it *is* the stamp of orthodoxy.”³⁰ Sawhney explains this interpretation by invoking the existence of an epistemological taxonomy – none other than the comparative characterization of Sanskrit and Prakrit forwarded by the early grammarians and Vedic exegetes – which, she argues, has enabled the ostensibly divine and eternal Sanskrit language to remain shielded from the movement of history in a way that has made it readily available *throughout* history as an instrument with which to shape and legitimize competing and compelling historical narratives.³¹ It is thus Sanskrit’s traditional

²⁸ Pollock 1996: 199: “Constituted by no imperial power or church but in large part by a communicative system and its political aesthetic, the Sanskrit ecumene is characterized by a transregionally shared set of assumptions about the basics of power, or at least about the ways in which power is reproduced at the level of representation in language, and Sanskrit’s unique suitability for this task.”

²⁹ Sawhney 2009: 5. For a discussion of Ayodhyā as an imaginary landscape of irrevocably sociopolitical consequences, see Lutgendorf 1997.

³⁰ Sawhney 2005: 5; emphasis original.

³¹ Sawhney 2009: 7. Cf. Pollock 1989: 610: “History...is not simply absent or unknown in Sanskritic India; rather, it is denied in favour of a model or “truth” that accorded history no epistemological value or social significance.” Pollock here argues that, by denying the historical

cosmological status as much as its employment in the hands of modern politicians that is assigned responsibility for these recent violations of human rights. Sawhney concludes:

Today, when these texts elicit attention, they elicit not reading as much as passion: the love of those who are driven by fidelity to an origin, for whom Sanskrit becomes a prop in the staging of a violent drama of cultural continuity, and the hatred of all those to whom both origin and history appear as a relentless saga of injustice. Indeed, the very question of what India is – a question that has, from the moment of its first murmur, given rise to not only unease and disagreement but also repeated horrific violence – is deeply connected to the status and place of Sanskrit texts in the live of the modern nation.³²

Where the epistemological agenda of the Brahmanical intellectual and philosophical traditions are given precedence over the culture and concerns demonstrated by sacred texts, it is not unusual to find the Sanskrit corpus represented in total, across both time and genre, as monocultural and preoccupied with the singular aim of instilling control. This tends to be a persistent theme in studies that rely on *śāstras* as indicators of Sanskrit's authoritative involvement in social formations, and is a predilection not only of colonial-era narratives, but also and significantly of critical, post-colonial historiographies that aim to reveal, and thereby destabilize, the discourses tied to Sanskrit by spotlighting the actual terms of its sociality.³³ As described by Gould, an enthusiastic supporter of this methodology, such scholarship is “devoted to examining the naturalization of stark power differentials by the śāstric texts of much Sanskrit Brahmanical tradition.”³⁴ To whatever degree these affiliations between language and formations in cultural power are borne out by the textual and linguistic taxonomies of Sanskrit's intellectual traditions, or indeed by the geopolitical patterns underscoring the spread of the language through Southeast Asia during the Common Era, the point remains that these treatments of Sanskrit as an overtly

transformation of the past, the vision of ahistoricity that underscores Pūrvamīmāṃsā's interpretation of Vedic language thereby denies historical transformations for the future, and thus serves “to naturalize the present and its asymmetrical relations of power.”

³² Sawhney 2009: 5.

³³ See comments in Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam 2007: 415-416, 422.

³⁴ Gould 2008: 538.

sociopolitical entity have been disinclined to consider it through the prism of religion as a metaphysical phenomenon of intrinsic validity, rather than as an imposing institution that constrains and disqualifies an equality of expression.

Such evaluations of Sanskrit do not consider its influence in the lives of countless millions who have a positive and personal relationship to the language, engaging with it in aesthetic, devotional, contemplative, ascetic, and other affective and transformative ways in the composition of a community of people whose history of relating to Sanskrit too can be mapped across more than three millennia. The difficulty here is that, in allowing sociopolitical interpretations to speak for the coextension between language and belief, Sanskrit's cultural specificity and significance must be sought in its secular uses, and whatever else this picture holds to give Sanskrit its internal coherence and enduring appeal is lost from sight. Thus, while the convergence of traditional śāstric and peculiarly postmodern concerns helps illumine an undeniably important strand of Sanskrit's history, we are yet forced to ask whether this is only one strand in the story and not a comprehensive history of the same. Furthermore, while it is true that many of Sanskrit's sacred texts are Brahmanical and, as such, prioritize normativity, they also display evidence of historically situated and widespread cultural epistemes that firstly indicate their situating in – and not above – the *laukika* practices of South Asian religious culture, and secondly insist upon different ways of reading the language that gives these texts their form and vitality in practice.³⁵

Determining the reasons for which mid-Vedic worldviews are seen not as worldviews but as heavily ritualized institutional configurations is an unavoidable part of this study. It is only by exploring the dialectics involved in the divide between viewing language as the substance of ideology and viewing language as an intrinsic component of a dynamic cosmology that the ground is set for understanding the context of the question “what is Sanskrit?”

³⁵ See discussion in F. Smith 2006a: 13.

The Relevance of Grammar: Sociolinguistic Interpretations

Viewed through the lens of methodology and its conceptual underpinnings, language presents itself as the logical object of investigations into a wide array of specifically human concerns by lending form to phenomena that evade structured analysis.³⁶ Although certain questions are raised by the fact that a condition of such language-centred study has been the separation of language from subjectivity, the legitimacy of the apparent relationship of language to social power and its formations is commonly accepted. Language is here seen not only as the medium through which ideas about reality or society or human worth are articulated, but as the means by which those ideas come to be disseminated and realized in the actual organization of a people, with the learned practices surrounding language – grammar, etymology, poetics, and so on – holding a determinative position in a culture’s ideational and pragmatic modes of self-expression. Rather than pursuing the elusive matters of how sensory experience informs what a language means to its people or how language itself exists in an ontological sense prior to its breaking down into analysable units, it is thus the correlation between internal linguistic characteristics and the external circumstances of how and by whom it is employed that generates a sociolinguistic picture of Sanskrit’s cultural significance.

While there is an absence of evidence to indicate that prior to its emergence from the ritual sphere Sanskrit functioned as anything other than a sacred language,³⁷ it is in broad agreement with the conceptualization of language just outlined that the term *saṃskṛta* has also come to facilitate the development of

³⁶ Harpham 2002: 235-236: “Not worth thinking about but excellent to think with, the unqualified term *language* commends itself to us primarily as a proxy for a host of concerns, questions, and anxieties – our position in the order of things, our rights and obligations, our relation to law, our beginnings and ends, the relations between faith and knowledge, the scope of our agency, the extent of our responsibilities, the origin of evil, the sexual divide (the Word as “he,” the “phallic” signifier), the laws of our being – that otherwise frustrate the desire for a formulation that would satisfy rationalist sensibilities.”

³⁷ With respect to epigraphy, Salomon follows Burrow (1955: 59) in cautioning that the inscriptional evidence for the early period gives “a very one-sided picture of the contemporary linguistic conditions” and asserts “Sanskrit was always, even when the use of Prakrit was most flourishing, the primary literary language of India” (1998: 94). Pollock (2006: 48) offers an opposing perspective, stating “it is not easy to believe that virtually every scrap of early evidence of such a [non-sacral] usage has been lost.”

a perspective that sees the restricted status of Sanskrit carried over into its worldly employments. The likelihood of this continuity has been reinforced by the close linguistic similarity between so-called Classical Sanskrit, the language described as *saṃskṛta* (“completely formed, perfected”) by the emergent literary milieu, and the earlier language known as Vedic, which the ritual texts themselves refer to simply as *vāc* (“speech, language”). Houben’s account of Sanskrit gives a clear description of the historical dimensions involved in sociolinguistic assessment, and is paradigmatic in taking the Common Era associations of *saṃskṛta* as sufficient explanation of its gravitas in the religious worldview:

Unlike most other language names, the name ‘Sanskrit’ is not the name of a people or country or nation. The name *saṃskṛta*, which literally means “polished, well-formed”, points to its socio-linguistic position throughout the ages: it was the cultured language of the well-educated, of the social and religious elite. The term Sanskrit properly applies to the regulated language which developed some centuries after Pāṇini’s grammar. By extension, however, it refers to the closely related earlier forms of Old-Indo-Aryan which are used in the Vedic texts.³⁸

This assessment exemplifies the determinative influence of the parameters within which modern approaches to language are conducted. By separating language from subjectivity – in phenomenological terms, meaning from being – *saṃskṛta* is addressed purely as an adjectival description that denotes the identity of the Sanskrit language relative to the social positioning of those with whom its employment is most immediately associated.

It is in this respect that Vyākaraṇa’s attractiveness to sociopolitical reconstructions of South Asian society goes beyond the glimpses it offers of Sanskrit in relation to other languages in the wider, non-ritual environment (a vantage point that does not appear in either revelatory texts or those pertaining to the mastery of liturgical skills). Rather, through their reiteration of the grammatical refinement of the ritual language and the discursive restrictions placed around its employment, the major texts of the early grammatical tradition are seen to make available a further selection of data with which to point out that

³⁸ Houben 1997: 53.

Sanskrit has long been used to put a rational face on irrational beliefs. Here again, because the question of whether *saṃskṛta* indicates a veridical phenomenon is not considered, and the possibility of a correspondence in sense between Vedic and later employments of the term not explored, the religious gravity of the language is readily subordinated to its social appearances. This section attempts to address the issue of whether the modern interpretation of these restrictions can in fact maintain the objectivity of its primary focus – the self-representation of Vyākaraṇa – once religious validity is taken out of consideration.

The *Paspaśā* or introductory section of the *Mahābhāṣya*, Patañjali's "Great Commentary" on the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* of Pāṇini, is the primary textual basis used by modern scholars in the retrieval of early sociolinguistic attitudes within the orthodox Sanskrit tradition. Evidence of these attitudes is typically sought in the form of assertions comparing the merit of the grammatical speech (*śabda*) used in ritual over against the ungrammatical or fallen speech (*apaśabda*) common in demotic practice. The appearance of these assertions is also often taken to be indicative of Patañjali's cultural positioning relative to historical events, such as the emergence of Buddhism and Jainism, in the centuries before the turn of the Common Era and shortly prior to the first employments of Sanskrit as a literary language. In many regards, then, Patañjali appears as the last arbiter of the *vaidika* grammatical tradition: not only is it in the *Mahābhāṣya* that we find preserved the *Vārttika* of his predecessor, Kātyāyana, which lends a multi-storied quality to Patañjali's scrutiny of his inherited tradition, but this scrutiny is coloured by its composer's singular focus on ritual performance. This latter characteristic exemplifies both Patañjali's description of grammar as belonging to the six auxiliary sciences of the Veda (*ṣaṣṭsu aṅgeṣu vyākaraṇam*) and distinguishes his interests from the variety of sectarian matters at play in later grammatical works.³⁹

Considered together with statements such as that, in his time, the earlier practice of learning grammar before studying the Veda had lost favour, the guiding principle of Patañjali's arguments for the study of grammar ("Grammar is to be studied for the sake of the preservation of the Vedas," *rakṣārtham*

³⁹ *Paspaśā* 3 (Kielhorn 1962).

*vedānām adheyam vyākaraṇam*⁴⁰) seems to indicate an original, emic connection between the intellectual content and ideological purpose of the *Mahābhāṣya*. While the precise historical dynamics of the *Mahābhāṣya*'s surrounding environment cannot be reconstructed on the basis of the textual evidence available, what is clear is that the language which Patañjali and Kātyāyana consider to be the object of grammar, *śabda*, is a textual language of recitation and transmission whose sphere of application is said to be the magnificent universe with its seven divisions of the earth and three worlds – but the extent of which is comprised solely of Sanskrit knowledge, namely, the fourfold Veda together with the auxiliary sciences and the esoteric knowledge of the priests, the dialogue portions of the Vedic canon, historical narratives and accounts, and medical learning.⁴¹ Quotidian applications of *śabda* are notably absent, and references to those known as *śiṣṭas* – educated Brahmins, and quite probably priests, whose close familiarity with Vedic language makes them reliable guides to correct usage – are ambiguous evidence at best for a spoken form of the language.

In addition to these delineations characterising *śabda*, Patañjali and Kātyāyana further distinguish grammatical language by its elevation (*abhyudaya*) of the speaker in equal measure to what is stated in Vedic passages and in accordance with the *dharma*, an unseen esoteric outcome, contained in the knowledge of grammatical forms.⁴² This distinction is confirmed by the equation of *ācāre niyamaḥ*, a restriction in regard to procedure, with *yājñe karmaṇi*, sacrificial activity.⁴³ But should it be taken to mark a discursive restriction in Brahmanical society, developing in reaction to external pressures, responding to a diminished social relevance of Sanskrit, and instantiating the suppression of Prakrit languages and literatures? In this matter, many scholars proceed in their analysis from the fact that the restrictions around *śabda* are elucidated not only by

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ *Paspaśā* 12: *mahān hi śabdasya prayogaṣṭayaḥ / saptadvīpā vasumatī trayāḥ lokāḥ catvāraḥ vedaḥ sāṅgaḥ sarāhasyaḥ...vākovākyam itihāsaḥ purāṇam vaidyakam iti etāvān śabdasya prayogaṣṭayaḥ /*

⁴² *Paspaśā* 13.

⁴³ *Paspaśā* 13, line 49: *yat api ucyate ācāre niyamaḥ iti yājñe karmaṇi saḥ niyamaḥ /* In this instance, Bhattacharyya (1991) gives the alternative reading: *...yājñe karmaṇi saḥ niyamō 'nyatrāniyamaḥ /*

what they include but by what they deny, namely, the possibility that ungrammatical forms (*apaśabda*) might be positively related to *dharma*, and thence that those who speak ungrammatically might be subject to elevation (*abhyudaya*) through language. The tendency here is to read deeply into these apparent prohibitions by postulating alignments between *apaśabda* and Prakrit, and between those who do not possess grammatical acuity and the vast majority of the ancient Indian population.⁴⁴

Deshpande presents an archetypal instance of how a thesis based on such interpretations can become reliant upon the generation of historical perspectives that are only tendentiously supported by primary source material and which, in fact, can even obscure the consistency of this material's internal logic.⁴⁵ The observable pattern of distinction between *śabda* and *apaśabda*, and the qualification that this distinction based on *dharma* is only tenable within the context of the activities of *yajña*, is thus given a boost by Deshpande, who suggests that Patañjali's grammar should be understood on the terms of its underscoring by social agenda. It is in accordance with this methodology that the establishment of Sanskrit within a sphere that is markedly narrower than that of the ungrammatical forms used in worldly communication is seen not to indicate a veridical co-extension of Sanskrit with the sacred, but as a testimony to conflict between the speakers of these apparently different languages. Deshpande summarizes:

From even a casual reading of the *Mahābhāṣya*, a fact clearly emerges, namely that there was a fierce competition between Sanskrit and Prakrit, and that in this competition the Prakrit had already surpassed Sanskrit as the language of the world (*loka*). Under these circumstances, the Sanskrit grammarians defended Sanskrit as the language of *dharma*, rather than as a language of worldly communication. The grammarians openly acknowledge that the function of communicating meaning is done equally well by Sanskrit and Prakrit. However, the grammarians stipulate that one

⁴⁴ This interpretation is not limited to studies of the *Mahābhāṣya*. While writing on Pāṇini, Deshpande (1993: 2) asserts that although "literally the term *bhāṣā* stands for "language," in fact, it actually refers to the upper-class language, in relation to which other forms of Indo-Aryan and non-Aryan languages were viewed as being substandard, as those peoples themselves were placed lower in the social hierarchy."

⁴⁵ See Aklujkar 2003: 2: "[Deshpande] provides a good case of how even a very capable and conscientious scholar reads the evidence problematically when he reads it under the influence of dominant tendencies in present-day Indology."

should communicate by using Sanskrit rather than by using Prakrit. Such a restriction is called a *dharmaniyama*, “a religious restriction,” and further Patañjali admitted that such a restriction applied only in the context of sacrificial performance.⁴⁶

As Aklujkar accurately observes in an important contribution to our understanding of Vyākaraṇa, one of the difficulties in Deshpande’s interpretation lies in his translation of *dharma* as amounting to religion in the sense of institutionalized and rule-bound norms of behaviour, which can then be read simply as indication of Brahmanical preoccupations with control and self-preservation.⁴⁷ It is of note that the possibilities raised by an alternative reading of *dharma* have not been considered by scholars dealing with the historical aspects of Sanskrit grammar; indeed, it appears to be the case that when metaphysical explanations are raised at all in this regard, it is the patent etymological link between *saṃskṛta* and *saṃskāra*, ritual purification or initiation, that is turned to. Pollock, for example, thus postulates that the sacerdotal associations of the language are in “complete harmony with grammar’s self-understanding” because Sanskrit “like other instruments or objects of liturgical practice [was] rendered and kept ritually pure” as a result of its grammatical segregation.⁴⁸ Van de Walle’s interpretation differs slightly, though it is constructed on similar grounds: “puritanism – a ‘sacred’ language should not be tampered with – was [the Brahmins’] answer to both the external and internal threats” posed by alternative

⁴⁶ Deshpande 1993: 25-26; cf. 1979: 10-11: “Another significant factor involved in this view is that Buddhism and Jainism were not only opposed to Vedic religion, but they were also opposed to the Sanskrit language in an attempt to undermine the authority of the Brahmins and to align themselves with the non-Brahmanical masses. ... Only on this hypothesis can we fully understand why Kātyāyana claims that only the use of Sanskrit leads to *Dharma*, while the ‘subnormal’ languages lead to *Adharma*.” Deshpande fails to note Patañjali’s views on this topic: namely, that the knowledge of ungrammatical forms does not lead to spiritual *demerit* but, presumably, is neutrally void of *dharma*. See *Paspaśā* 13: *nanu coktaṃ jñāna dharma iti cet tathādharmā iti / na eṣo doṣaḥ /.../...śabdaś ca śabdajñāne dharmam āha nāpaśabdajñāne ’dharmam /*

⁴⁷ Aklujkar 2004: 693-701; 724 n.6. Cf. Van de Walle 1993: 14: “The brahmins, the losers in the power game, clung to the ‘brahmanical perspective’ no matter what the socio-political reality was.... Furthermore, the prestige the brahmins accorded to Sanskrit was inversely proportional to its actual status. The more prominent the Prakrits in public life, the more extreme the views they held on Sanskrit.” Van de Walle relies heavily on Deshpande’s interpretation.

⁴⁸ Pollock 2006: 45-46. Cardona, who Pollock follows here, explains that the activities of grammar were seen as a *saṃskāra* in two ways: “as a derivational explanation of correct speech forms” and “as a purification of speech, since correct speech forms are thereby segregated from corrupt ones” (1988: 653-655).

cultural developments during this period.⁴⁹ Whilst acknowledging the exception provided by Houben, it is hard not to note that, as in the case of *dharmaniyama*, the recognition of *saṃskāra* serves the tactical end of contributing to hermeneutic agenda other than the retrieval of an emic view; despite its centrality to religious practice, it is not accorded integrity independently of external sources of meaning.⁵⁰

Such interpretations should not, however, be taken to indicate that the pursuit of these religious concepts fails to yield convincing evidence of other ways of understanding the grammarian's emphasis on *dharma*. Aklujkar notes that of the three senses in which this term is used in the *Mahābhāṣya*, the meaning that is most salient to Patañjali's discussion of *dharmaniyama* is that of "a positive and unseen, non-mundane effect generated by sticking to a norm."⁵¹ Through a comparative investigation of the *Mahābhāṣya* and the circa fifth-century works of Bhartṛhari, and considered also in light of evidence drawn from an array of Vedic, grammatical, and exegetical texts, Aklujkar reaches the conclusion that *dharma* is indeed closely bound with the imperatives contained in the Veda, but, to the degree that it is something activated by particular recommended actions, it does not so much refer to a rigid and instantiated order as it does to the cosmological potency thus uncovered.⁵² *Dharma* is implicit in *brahman* and kin to *ṛta*; and from this embedding in the thick complexities of the Vedic cosmos, it refers further to both the extramundane properties of objects in the physical world and to the Vedic textual injunctions themselves, which are seen as extensions of *dharma*'s world-sustaining quality.⁵³ Aklujkar cautions that Patañjali's references to metaphysical phenomena should not be automatically understood as an implication of religious strictures into intellectual texts to the

⁴⁹ Van de Walle 1993: 14.

⁵⁰ Houben 2004: 396-397: "Knowledge of Sanskrit is so closely connected with Vedic ritual, its study and performance, that it can be regarded as part of the extended phenotype of Vedic ritual."

⁵¹ Aklujkar 2004: 693. The other two senses of *dharma* identified by Aklujkar are (2) what the *śāstra* or *āgama* (viz. Veda) advises one to do; and (3) an attribute, property, or quality.

⁵² Ibid.: 701: "In the present context, *dharma* is spoken of as directly leading to some kind of elevation and, indirectly, to attainment of *brahman* or spiritual liberation (*mokṣa*). It clearly then has the ability, probably dependent on how much of it is acquired and for how long, to affect one's surrounding and one's own personality or being. It seems to be a force or an unseen item resembling energy or potency that is conducive to one's welfare, particularly spiritual welfare."

⁵³ Ibid.: 705-706.

ends of forcing a sociolinguistic divide when these concepts validly contribute to the analytical frame that the Pāṇinian grammarians work within. He asserts:

metaphorical language cannot be avoided at all levels of rigorous logical thinking, especially when one is dealing with cosmogony. As for the possible impression of ‘sectarian mystic talk,’ we should not allow it to be formed simply because entities like *dharma* and Veda are mentioned. Although these entities figure in religio-spiritual discussions, it behooves us to explore them for the function they serve in the world of philosophers who otherwise appear to be as much given to logic, reasoning, rationality, etc., as we or the philosophers from any other tradition.⁵⁴

The defining feature of *dharma* for this intellectual context and metaphysical worldview would thus be its markedly cosmological status, upon which the ritual activities prescribed by the Veda are grounded by extension.

This observation is accompanied by a perceptible hermeneutic shift from treating the *Mahābhāṣya* in isolation from its object, its objective, and its cultural embedding, to preserving the existence claims made in the text and allowing them to inform the nuances of interpretation.⁵⁵ Restated, the approach modelled by Aklujkar does not attempt to separate the actual referential meaning of Patañjali’s statements from the existence claims which they contain; as such, it is a shift at the level of how religious language is conceptualised, rather than a change made to philological methods of textual analysis, that permits a statement such as “there is *dharma* in grammatical words and their knowledge” to hold substantial nominal integrity.⁵⁶ Working from within this framework, then, it is possible to press forth the following with respect to the *vaiyākaraṇas*’ characterization of grammatical language. Firstly, the category *apaśabda*, commonly translated as ungrammatical or corrupt language, is not confined to Prakrit words but includes attested Sanskrit forms.⁵⁷ The identifications *śabda* and *apaśabda* are positioned on a single linguistic continuum; and it needs to be noted that the grammarians address language at the level of individual word-forms, rather than arguing for the existence of a strict and unbridgeable opposition between Sanskrit and Prakrit

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ *Paspaśā* 4, 11.

⁵⁶ The theoretical implications of this shift and its grounding in religious phenomenology are discussed at length below.

⁵⁷ Bhandarkar 1914; Aklujkar 2004: 713.

languages, their speakers and affiliated social echelons. This strongly suggests that it is not a binary opposition between Sanskrit and Prakrit that the grammarians are concerned with, but a latent and qualitative potential of language that is in force when language is *śabda*. Following this, secondly, there is a lack of evidence to indicate that the Brahmanical composers of these texts associated Prakrit languages and, by extension, the speakers thereof with spiritual demerit, *adharmā*, as asserted by Deshpande. Such distinctions in language are made on the soteriological, not social, grounds of what possesses the capacity to activate or reveal *dharma*; and the nature of these grounds and this concern is reinforced by an explanation to the effect that seers (*ṛṣayah*) of the Veda use ungrammatical forms of speech (*apa-√bhāṣ*) quite appropriately and without negative results in non-sacral settings, i.e., outside of the immediate context identified by *yājñe karmani*, sacrificial activity.⁵⁸

Religious Language as an Interpretative Context

The emic characteristics of the *vaidika* grammarians' treatment of language have hermeneutic repercussions that can be imputed immediately into the study of Sanskrit's cultural significance and the approach to India's ancient religious texts. As a preliminary step in this direction, which forms an ever-present undercurrent of the following chapters, it is worthwhile considering Akhujkar's conclusions at some length:

...until we have good evidence to stand on, we should not think only in terms of self-serving strategies on the part of groups of characters populating ancient Indian history. Being hardnosed about the evidence or reading between the lines of evidence are procedures that a good historian should always practice, but these procedures should not be applied only to one group or tradition or by going beyond the contextually supported meanings of the words in our evidence. The Pāṇinians' conception of the relationship between grammar and *dharma* is not as outlandish or self-servingly brahmanical as it may seem at first. The conception fits quite well with the other features of the dominant mode of ancient Indian

⁵⁸ *Paspaśā* 13.

intellectual life. This mode is different. It is quite out of fashion in our times. But it cannot be inferior just for those reasons. It has not been proved that it lacks validity, and it may in fact be the case that we can learn something valuable from it.⁵⁹

This raises two points, which, I argue, are imperative to the advancement of modern knowledge about Sanskrit, its textuality, and its evolving interactions with other languages and religious communities on the subcontinent. The first is that, as a religious language inseparable from practices of self-transformation, the metaphysical value of Vedic or Sanskrit derives from more than either a simple relationship to the Veda as canon or the high expressivity made possible by grammatical sophistication – or the social affiliation with Aryan origins which these might suggest. As much as śāstric culture, for example, made full use of Sanskrit’s potential for technical minutiae and Vedic associations in its establishment of rigorous epistemological standards and prioritization of normativity, this is neither representative of the spectrum of ends to which Sanskrit has been employed nor exhausts its metaphysical significance in *vaidika* milieu. This observation, together with its concomitant shift of attention to the retrieval of what might be termed the indigenous parameters of engagement with language (*vāc*) demonstrated by the Vedic revelatory texts, sets the ground for the examination undertaken in the following chapters.

With respect to the second point raised by Aklujkar’s conclusion, this same change in the way religious language is conceptualized should be extended to the employment of Prakrits by Buddhism and Jainism, a key event in India’s linguistic history that is often interpreted a sign of resistance to orthodoxy and which, therefore, has come to provide the empirical basis on which to contextualize Brahmanical characterizations of Vedic language in terms of a reaction to social pressures. While it is undeniable that such responses played a significant part in the evolution of both Buddhist and Brahmanical self-identification in the centuries just prior to the Common Era, what has not been established is whether a paradigm based on reactivity and mutual exclusion is the

⁵⁹ Aklujkar 2004: 723.

most appropriate backdrop against which to view these cultural developments, or even representative of their participants' most pressing concerns.

The notion of a collision of interests grounded in disparate social ideologies has long held popularity as a touchstone in the study of Indian society during the second urbanization period in the latter half of the first millennium BCE, and is portrayed as an inseparable condition of the flourishing of renunciant movements that is seen to account for the rise of non-orthodox movements, on one hand, and the metaphysical developments represented in the orthodox Upaniṣads, on the other. For Bronkhorst, Kulke and Rothermund, and Witzel in particular, conflict between Brahmins and Buddhists is not limited to an historical event, but rather describes an ancient sociological formation that can first be glimpsed in the Brāhmaṇas, the mid-Vedic ritual revelations.⁶⁰ This approach builds upon the concept of a schematic division between two cultural complexes, Kuru-Pañcāla and Kosala-Videha, that are respectively characterised by their geographical (western, eastern or central gangetic) and social positioning (Vedic, non-Brahmanical). More important, however, is the fact that this historiography establishes the collision between Buddhist and Brahmanical perspectives in the essentializing terms of altogether different cultural origins. As Hopkins describes the situation:

To say that there was tension between these two worlds – the non-Aryan/Buddhist/Jain world on the one hand, and the Aryan/Brahmanical/Vedic world on the other – is to understate the case. In the sixth century BCE they were really two different world, at least as perceived by their main representatives, or perhaps – as seen especially by the Brahmins – two opposite worlds.⁶¹

Expressing a sentiment that he shares with Bronkhorst, another leading scholar in this area of study, Witzel asserts that passages in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* that make mention of an eastern culture are not mythological accounts, but records of the historical arrival of “Vedic (Kuru-Pañcāla) orthopraxy in the east.”⁶²

⁶⁰ Bronkhorst 1997; Kulke and Rothermund 1998; Witzel 1997a, b.

⁶¹ Hopkins 1999: 53-54 (unpublished manuscript cited in Samuel 2008: 50).

⁶² Witzel 1997a: 311; 1997b: 50-51. The primary sources that Witzel employs are *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 3.2.1.23, 13.8.1.5, and 1.4.1.14-17; he also cites *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* 1.337-338. Bronkhorst (2007: 8) sees the latter as evidence of Brahmanical prejudice against the eastern

Although these accounts draw attention to the presence of significant historical information in texts that have often been portrayed as dealing exclusively with ritual minutiae, the practice of searching for articulated points of differentiation here obscures the cultural intuitions inherited by Buddhism and Brahmanism alike, and which would provide the grounds of a deeper appreciation of the ways in which their respective textual practices differ.⁶³

Turning now to Buddhist materials, the theory of ideological conflict provides one of the two leading explanations for early sentiments against the employment of Sanskrit, with the other being that local languages were preferred for pragmatic, pedagogic purposes.⁶⁴ *Vinaya Piṭaka* II 139 records the Buddha as instructing two monks, Brahmins by birth, that his teachings (*buddhavacana*) should not be disseminated in the style of the Veda (*chandaso*) but using his own words or language (*sakāya niruttiyā*).⁶⁵ Where this account is notorious for the ambiguity of what precisely is intended by the reference to *chandas*, Vedic metrics, *Aṅguttara Nikāya* I 72-73⁶⁶ draws a more evidently pejorative comparison between the deeply meaningful *sūtras* spoken by the Buddha (*ye te suttantā tathāgathabhāsīt gambhīrā gambhīratthā lokuttarā...*) and the ornately embellished ones crafted by *kavis*, Vedic poets, and stemming from outsiders (*ye pana te suttantā kavikatā kāveyyā cittakkharā cittabyañjanā bāhirakā...*); furthermore, this text states that the superficially seductive power of the latter should be avoided by right-thinking people.⁶⁷ The *Bhūridatta Jātaka* continues the rejection of the Brahmanical use of language and contextualizes it within the wider scope of denounced practices, thereby linking what appears to be an implicit rejection of Sanskrit *vis à vis* the speeches (*vācā*) of the Brahmins to a

cultural complex of Magadhā. Kulke and Rothermund (1998: 48-49) similarly see the primary sources as recollections of “events of great significance.”

⁶³ The topic of a shared Indo-Aryan heritage is discussed in DeCaroli 2004; also Samuel 2008: 61.

⁶⁴ Houben 1997: 54-55: “[Restrictions on who could perform rites] has given Brahminical [*sic*] culture the conservative outlook which was also reflected in their attitude towards language. The Buddhists and the Jainas, on the other hand, were intent on expanding their numbers by convincing people to accept their message, which they tried to express in the language of the masses.” Although Houben indicates in the direction of a metaphysical explanation for the brahmanical adherence to Sanskrit, he does not raise the matter of corresponding metaphysical bases for the Buddhist and Jain orientations to language.

⁶⁵ Oldenburg 1879-1883. My discussion follows the interpretation of Levman 2008-2009: 39; cf. Brough 1996, Hoffman 1992.

⁶⁶ Morris and Harvey 1888.

⁶⁷ See discussion of attitudes to *kavis* and *kāvya* in Middle Indic sources in Jamison 2007: 144.

larger diatribe against Brahmanical practices with attention drawn specifically to animal sacrifice and the study of the Veda.⁶⁸

These early Buddhist sentiments identify the Brahmins' relationship to the Veda as a point of clearly articulated disagreement and back up this position through their own literary practices. Following this, it comes as no surprise that the differences in Buddhist and Brahmanical self-representation and the practical implementation of their respective ideologies should inform the development of an hermeneutic binary, nor that this should be drawn upon in literary critical studies of Sanskrit.⁶⁹ Yet it is viable to suggest that given the complexity of language from a cosmological perspective – a contention reinforced by the very existence of these debates – the Buddhist and Brahmanical arguments involve far more than a simple rejection or acceptance of the institutions associated with Sanskrit's sway.⁷⁰ The issues at stake, prior even to reflecting an humane concern with people's soteriological equality, touch profoundly upon foundational metaphysical notions of what constitutes reality. Therefore, given the primacy attributed respectively to *veda* and *buddhavacana*, it appears that a cornerstone of South Asian thinking about revelation is the understanding that language must function in fidelity or otherwise conform to the underlying principles that are definitive of reality if it is to truly reveal that truth. With respect to Buddhism, *buddhavacana* necessarily embodies the cosmological principles that form the vanishing point of the Buddha's *dharma*, namely, *pratityasamutpāda*, dependent origination, or the idea that all phenomena continually arise in dependence upon, and hence cannot be conceptualized in strict isolation from, other phenomena; *anātman*, "not-self," which proposes that all phenomena lack any substantial or essential dimension of existence, such as a soul or spirit; and *anitya*, the impermanence that results from the absence of an independent, constant, or substantial aspect of being that might abide eternally. On this, the

⁶⁸ *Bhūridatta Jātaka* 6.924 [VI 213]; see in particular *vācā kata giddhikatā gahitā, dummocayā kavyāpathānupannā* (Fausbøll 1896: 213).

⁶⁹ As Pollock (2006: 54-55) states with reference to *Vinaya Piṭaka* II 139: "The resistance to Sanskrit, which had a very rich later history, is perceived for the first time in the Buddha's rejection here."

⁷⁰ Aklujkar 2013: 8, 12-13; see especially his statements on page 12: "It is more instructive that the Jain and Buddhist mode of claiming a special status for their canonical languages is Brahmanical than the fact that a special status is claimed."

Mahāhatthipadoma Sutta is clear: “One who sees dependent origination sees the Dhamma; one who sees the Dhamma sees dependent origination” (*yo paṭiccasamuppādaṃ passati so dhammaṃ passati; yo dhammaṃ passati so paṭiccasamuppādaṃ passatī ti*).⁷¹

To the extent that the Buddha’s revelations must be subject, like everything else, to the principles outlined, they must not be mistaken as eternal, unchanging, or independent of external influences – the phenomenological properties most immediately ascribed to the Veda.⁷² In the terms of a sheer metaphysical imperative, this raises a number of issues of perception, of which a few are particularly salient to the present discussion. Firstly, it is ostensible that, from the Buddhist perspective, the Brahmanical attitude to Sanskrit was an exercise in misplaced faith and mindlessness, encouraging sensory grasping, and which ultimately arose from ignorance (*avidyā*). It seems fitting that the Buddha would discourage monastics from teaching the *dharma* in Sanskrit, especially given that a significant percentage of Buddhists comprised converts from the Brahmanical community. This point comes into sharper focus when we bear in mind the Buddha’s repeated emphasis that it is direct perception, and not unquestioning deference to tradition, that gives a teaching authenticity. The authority of a teaching or a text is inseparable from the matrix of “right” (Pali: *sammā*) bodily, mental, and verbal behaviours that come together in the articulation of a discourse; and these determining factors cannot be learned by rote but necessarily rise in dependence upon an individual’s direct experiences of the *dharma*. These concerns do not speak well of the Buddhist apprehension of *vaidika* practices, but they do indicate the existence of a solid metaphysical ground for the rejection of Sanskrit, which appears to be rather more complex than what is suggested by a sociopolitical interpretation, and also preserves the soteriological integrity of the claims made by the Buddhist texts.

⁷¹ *Majjhima Nikāya* I 190-191 (Trenckner and Chalmers 1888-1902) translated in Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi 2005: 284.

⁷² Cousins 1983: 3: “What is envisaged for sutta is not then a set body of literature, but rather a traditional pattern of teaching. Authenticity lies not in historical truth although this is not doubted, but rather in whether something can accord with the essential structure of the *dhamma* as a whole.”

Secondly, as from the Buddhist perspective of *anātman* language cannot contain any essential core of meaning, the relation between a word and its referent is simply a practical matter of social convention and is liable to change, both from place to place and over time.⁷³ An extreme degree of flexibility in choice of language and the structure of teaching is an upshot of this metaphysical position: the matter of which language was used to teach in was simply no matter at all, but instead bears upon the notion of skilful means (*upāya*), which permits of a broad range of actions providing they serve the *dharma*. Again, there is a link here between authority and specifically Buddhist soteriology, with the relationship between language, meaning, and precision in teaching being established upon the prerequisite of direct perception, following which a speaker possesses an heightened awareness of their audience and what is needed to ensure effective communication. While this orientation contains social values which are markedly more egalitarian than the hierarchical structure of *varṇa*, it is once again important to note that the use of regional or vernacular languages reflects basic metaphysical premises and is not solely an outcome of reaction to, rejection of, and competition with Brahmins. A third point reinforces the significance of metaphysical interpretations but introduces a somewhat different dimension: Buddhist texts of all time periods, from the conservative Pali canon to the more open and fluid Mahāyāna output, contain numerous instances of language as an agent in the manifestation of extraordinary powers (*siddhi*) by consummate meditators.⁷⁴ These ubiquitous references not only attest to a matter in which the Buddhist and Brahmanical traditions agreed despite the vast difference in their metaphysical views, but make for a significant link between each of these cultural juggernauts and the ambient environment within which they were embedded.⁷⁵ Indeed, the pan-Indian character of the belief in the power of language – alongside widespread practices of affective embodiment, attainment of supernatural abilities, and spirit worship/placation – highlights the restrictive

⁷³ Levman writes: “recognizing that words lacked a center of denotative meaning, [the Buddha’s] teachings are a study in circumlocutory play” (2008-2009: 33). See also p. 46: “For [the Buddha] words were not eternal and unchangeable as the Veda was for Brahmins; words were simply social conventions. His teachings reflect this view, using a “decentered” approach to language with synonymic and near-synonymic word repetition being a constant feature of his style.”

⁷⁴ Cabezon 2008; Fiordalis 2012.

⁷⁵ For example, see discussion in DeCaroli 2004: 15.

nature of theoretical models which view Sanskrit and its place in Vedic ritual in isolation from phenomena that can be identified as characteristics of South Asian religious culture more broadly.

To this must be added that the evidence provided by Vedic texts – as Olivelle has pointed out – does not support the cleaving of India’s ancient religious culture into a categorical distinction between orthodox and heterodox traditions, but rather indicates that the emergence of new practices of self-transformation were grappled with within Brahmanical culture itself and can viewed within a context of mutual entanglement that can be traced back as far as the *Ṛgveda*.⁷⁶ Not only, then, do the above findings strongly suggest that there is much to be gained from a reconsideration of Sanskrit’s cultural significance in light of its metaphysical encoding, but it appears that the boundaries assumed to exist between Brahmanical orthodoxy and ambient culture also merit investigation. In the words of Frederick Smith:

folk culture by definition preceded Sanskritic culture and continued to flourish alongside it without operating in opposition to it. However, Sanskritic culture was never very far behind or far removed from folk culture. Indeed, one can argue that early Sanskritic, which is to say Vedic, culture is nothing more than a poetic or literary redaction of folk culture. Folk culture was part of Sanskritic culture from the outset.⁷⁷

Although this reframing of Vedic texts and culture may seem unlikely to some given the popular force of received Mīmāṃsāka and Vedāntin views on the Veda and human experience, the sheer amount of data retrieved from the Saṃhitās, Brāhmaṇas, and Upaniṣads demonstrates otherwise. Language (*vāc*) in these texts has more to say about the dynamic intersection of speech and person in Vedic soteriology than it does about the employment of Sanskrit in the engineering of Brahmanical orthodoxy.⁷⁸ Moreover, the interdimensional affectivity of language

⁷⁶ Olivelle 2011: 14; see also Samuel 1998: 153-172. Some recent publications that discuss salient features of “non-orthodox” phenomena in Vedic literature include Deeg 1993, F. Smith 2006, and White 2003.

⁷⁷ F. Smith 2006a: 147.

⁷⁸ Ibid.: 199: “No doubt, brahmanism was an increasingly conservative intellectual and cultural movement that denied many of the less-Sanskritic elements of Indian social, intellectual, and spiritual culture. It also exploited its custody of literature and literacy in order to tilt Indian culture to the social and material advantage of the brahmins. And, in no small measure, this required the

– its transforming effect on humans and their world across the multiple and overlapping layers of *mantra*, sacrificial performance, ontology, and the unfolding revelation that each canonical text is itself an instance of – appears to resist the notion that the coextension of Sanskrit and *yajña* was something that divorced Sanskrit from the life-world of *laukika* practices. This phenomenology of language, whose study forms the major part of this work, argues for the legitimacy, if not centrality, of human experience and embodiment states in Vedic religious culture in the middle of the first millennium BCE. It also hints at a porous – though perhaps precarious – relationship between Brahmanical and folk cultures in this time period, prior to the development of intellectual Brahmanism in later śāstric circles. As suggested above, if we are to begin retrieving language as an indigenous category from the Vedic texts, we must firstly expand the parameters currently assigned to Sanskrit.

Vāc: A Case for Language

To the extent that the mid-Vedic period has played a central role in the development of sociopolitical critiques of Brahmanical orthodoxy and ritualism, it is practical to raise the matter of emic perspectives on language (*vāc*), and not only because it is a consideration that provides an interesting counterpoint to the modern hermeneutic reliance on language that is already implicated within the development of these interpretations. To do so is also practical because, in a philology-based discipline that inevitably has language as its vanishing-point, the awareness of differences empowers us to reconsider the way we work with Sanskrit – and it is immanently practical because it is more than theoretical: through these reconsiderations, we are hopefully able to bring our analytical methods closer to the practices of engaging with *vāc* that are revealed through the

denial of public forms of self-expression and empowerment, including possession. However, before the philosophy and theology of the Vedas and Upaniṣads devolved into brahmanism, possession was recognized, even embraced by brahmins. This was before the folk parted way with the Sanskritic.”

primary sources, thereby recovering more of what is being said through an improved understanding of how it is being said.

It is in this connection that I forward two contentions, originally pressed forth by Frederick Smith with respect to spirit and deity possession.⁷⁹ Firstly, the “force of ethnographic accounts” – to which I would add the force of religious anthropologies – should elicit a re-examination of middle Vedic texts for evidence of a direct and primary involvement between language and the person. This involves a careful scrutiny of cosmological dynamics, which are not only articulated by texts but encoded within their structures. After all, revelatory texts provide both descriptions of language and vital examples of language at play. Related to this, the second contention is that recent Indological accounts of Sanskrit do not encompass or address the full spectrum of the language as it is demonstrated in Vedic texts. Curiously, and for similar reasons, nor do the traditional systems of grammar, exegesis, and epistemology that have so often been taken as the authoritative representatives of the culture surrounding Sanskrit. In order to retrieve the human dimensions of *saṃskṛta* as an indigenous category, our understanding of Sanskrit must expand beyond the parameters that are currently being assigned to it.

Sanskrit and the Question of Experience

While other Sanskrit texts, such as those belonging to the traditions of Vyākaraṇa and Alāṅkāraśāstra, already discussed, make efforts to isolate and define subgroups of language based on the domains and restrictions on their usage, the middle Vedic Brāhmaṇas and Āraṇyakas speak of *vāc* as a unified complex with mutating boundaries that encompass language in all of its manifestations, from the encoded structures of the Vedic hymns (*chandās*) to speech in the human body and the sounds of the natural environment. Conversely, the consistency of Vedic ritual recitations are able to “reveal or confirm the fundamental affinity of man with speech.”⁸⁰ Just as *vāc* is not always Sanskrit, then, it is *vāc* and not

⁷⁹ Ibid.: 4.

⁸⁰ Malamoud 2002: 19, 23.

Sanskrit that is coextensive with *brahman* or Prajāpati.⁸¹ It is the consanguinity of all aspects of language, transcendent of domain and restriction, that binds *vāc* to the unveiling of the cosmos in manifest form and to the ongoing sacrificial project of world-making. From an emic perspective, this consanguinity denies the possibility of any strict categorical distinction within Sanskrit as it is used in ritual and in the human life-world; and it sits in opposition to contemporary theories of the meaninglessness of the ritual sphere that emerged from the earlier Vedic sacrifice. Such porosity between language, person, and cosmos opens the study of Sanskrit to how the affective dimensions of language inform not only its conceptualization, but its appearance in the texts.

To those who undergo the experience of bodily “entextualization,” divinization or attunement to the wider universe through the merging of external linguistic forms with the internal structures of subjectivity, language is a veridical reality, with a profound ability to instigate transformations in self-identity.⁸² In this admittedly internalist view, language is far more than the simple symbolic representation of something conceptualized, but is rather an exacting instance of the experience which it immediately embodies and is seen as a literal expression or distillation of. This understanding runs against the grain of much modern academic theorizing about the cultural and historical significance of Sanskrit, which, as we have already seen, negotiates the deep association between Sanskrit and ritual through reliance upon external standards more amenable to critical agenda. These standards introduce points of reference that comply with commonly agreed-upon rules of the theoretical game – rationality, neutrality, historical facticity, and so on – yet they also hint at an embedded characteristic of the modern hermeneutic approach to language: because of the desirability of empirically observable hard data in analysis, language itself, as ontological, is rarely the actual subject of studies of language.⁸³ As described by Fynsk, this

⁸¹ Note that this corresponds to postulations forwarded by the Vedic exegetes; see *Pūrvamīmāṃsāsūtra* 1.3.10 and 12 with Kumāriḷa’s *Tantravārttika* commentary (Josi 1971-80).

⁸² Flood 2009: 87; F. Smith 2006a: 376-378, 385; Samuel 2008: 351.

⁸³ Harpham 2002: ix: “Nothing meaningful...can be said about language as such, both because language “as such” is not available for direct observation and because the features, aspects, characteristics, and qualities that can be attributed to language approach the infinite. Language is inadequate as an object of knowledge both because there is too little information available, and because there is too much.” See also the statement that “Imagining a language would, in fact,

approach results in a markedly narrow accounting of the value of language's metaphysical status in the development of personal identity.

The linguistic turn in modern thought tends to sweep right by the most basic, but admittedly elusive, fact – the simple fact *that there is language*. Thus, the questioning that should proceed from this fact, the question, to start, of the “essence” of language, is left to the residual obscurities of a few guiding texts. The result is a general impoverishment of all the analyses that have been enabled by this linguistic turn and the notion of the linguistic construction of identity – analyses throughout the disciplines of the humanities and social sciences that have been of immeasurable importance for cultural and sociopolitical study. What has been lost?... Most immediately: everything of language that exceeds the order of signification, together with the human share in this “excess” that is the (non)ground of history and the material site of all relationality, beginning with that unthought that is widely termed “culture.”⁸⁴

The foregrounding of meaning, retrievable through the scientific means of linguistics and apprehended in independence of the existence of an human subject, broadly outlines the respect in which language has sat at the fore of twentieth century hermeneutics. It also interfaces with the place of textual analysis in the reconstruction of Sanskrit's historical significance in South Asian religious culture. As one scholar of comparative religions and religious phenomenology, Gavin Flood, notes, “from an outsider perspective, or from a rational perspective which seeks to distinguish meaning from being, the history of religions which does not distinguish existence from language – particularly from mythological language – is a history of error.”⁸⁵ This approach automatically places a limit on the extent to which a religious statement, let alone a religious language, is understood.⁸⁶ A good example of this type of thinking about language comes from Harvey Alper's introduction to the volume *Understanding Mantras – mantras* being perhaps the paradigmatic instance and model of religious language in India – in which he explains:

become strictly impossible, because the attempt to do so would summon forth not clean linguistic facts (of the sort Wittgenstein thought he had discovered and described in the *Tractatus*), but the vast debris of the world” (ibid.: 3).

⁸⁴ Fynsk 1996: 1.

⁸⁵ Flood 1999: 103.

⁸⁶ Ibid.: 102.

Most of us who study *mantras* critically – historians, philosophers, Sanskritists – take the Enlightenment consensus for granted. We do not believe in magic. Generally, we do not pray. If we do pray, we try to do so in a universalistic idiom.... According to the standards of modern science, *mantras* are irrational. Mantraśāstra thus shares neither the prestige of modernity nor the lingering prestige of traditional Western religion. Perhaps for this reason it has fallen through the cracks of Indology.⁸⁷

The compartmentalization of language from religion to which Alper draws our attention facilitates the separation of meaning from being described by Flood.⁸⁸ The influence of contemporary political philosophy is also evident here, presenting the ethical ideal of a state that is “neutral with respect to religion and the differing value systems accepted by its citizens,” the replication of which amounts to an hermeneutic ideal.⁸⁹

Recent doubts cast on the appropriateness of the configuration of religion as a self-contained isolate within a broader arena of secular activity notwithstanding, the restricted domain of *yajña* has entailed precisely that assertions made with respect to the significance of Sanskrit have not been seen as particularly meaningful at all.⁹⁰ What results is a reconceptualization of the descriptions contained within religious texts as narratives, from which the facts needed for critical analysis are sorted out and located within a temporal, context-relative framework. With respect to the study of Brahmanical texts, the implication is that the religious statements they contain do not amount to factual expressions of human experience in the life-world. For Flood, this means that the activity of passively describing and attempting to map what appear to be traces of

⁸⁷ Alper 1991: 5.

⁸⁸ See Burns Coleman and White on the “privatization” of religion (2010: 1-3); cf. Turner 1997: 36-37: “(In contemporary multicultural society, pluralism in religion and culture) leads to a market situation in religion where within a global and cosmopolitan environment modern people can choose religious styles and beliefs rather like they choose commodities.” As Burns Coleman and White note, this situation typifies a distinct rupture with cosmological traditions: “Within the post-modern lifestyle we do not simply choose things; we *know* that we choose them” (2010: 3).

⁸⁹ Burns Coleman and White *ibid.*: 2; cf. Dallmayr 1996, especially 39-62.

⁹⁰ Hertel and Humes offer a succinct statement of the asymmetry between this relatively recent conceptualization of religion and the traditional world-view, which, although made with respect to contemporary Hinduism, is nonetheless applicable to the present discussion (1993: 7): “*religion* in a more limited sense of activities such a puja and fasting can be seen as distinct from other social institutions of education, politics, and so on. For most “Hindus” their religion is more inclusive. For many, Hinduism is a way of life. Thus, *Hindu religion* in the broader sense encompasses *religion* in the narrower meaning.”

consciousness in texts becomes instead an active construction of historical narrative, through which language is moved “completely away from any essentialist understanding of religion” and religious meanings are drained of any existential content.⁹¹ Put one way, the resultant envisioning of belief as dogma “over-intellectualizes religious activity,” while its construal as a matter of preference or sentiment “gives religion the characteristic of a personal (emotional or aesthetic) taste, rather than something that is an organizing force of one’s life that provides it with meaning.”⁹² Restated, Flood asserts that any interpretative position which proposes to take a neutral or agnostic stance on the link between meaning and being “is in the end an implicit denial of it and an implicit hermeneutics of suspicion” because it precludes the possibility of attributing actual positive value to religious perspectives.⁹³

These methodological quandaries – the separation of language from ontology and of religion from historical culture – were apparently not shared by the composers of the Vedic canon, but they do bring us into the precipitous terrain of the relevance of experience to our understanding of Sanskrit. The prevailing modern perspectives on this issue, and their repercussions for textual analysis, are discussed extensively in the next chapter. At this point, however, the fact bears noting that because the śāstric privileging of theory over experience does not account for the central role of embodiment in a diverse range of Tantric, yogic, devotional, Vedic, epic, medical and literary traditions, the ostensible absence of personal experience in Sanskrit texts has every reason to raise our suspicions. Just as the apropos extension of śāstric categories to Sanskrit texts (envisioned as a singular class) has redefined Sanskrit, the extension of these same normative concerns to Brahmins and Brahmanical culture overall has the effect of strongly reorienting the people and practices studied – or of perpetuating, in the words of Frederick Smith, conclusions which are “little more than weary stereotyping” and fail to address the fact that “many if not most brahmins demur in practice, at least part of the time, from the “ism” of

⁹¹ Flood 1999: 113-114. He writes: “Engaging with religious phenomena in this sense of locating ‘data’ within narrative, does not give privileged position to religion and places it within the context of its wider cultural history.”

⁹² Burns Coleman and White 2010: 4.

⁹³ Flood 1999: 102.

brahmanism, and probably always have.”⁹⁴ By understanding that the monocultural edifice referred to is comprised of official śāstric opinion, this latter perspective on Brahmans and religious culture sets contextual parameters around scholarly observations which, in the words of Richard Gombrich, suggest that “brahmanism inculcated control” in such a way as to deny value to – and even to screen out – the place of potentially uncontrolled (and uncontrollable) subjective experience in religion.⁹⁵

It is important for our purposes to note that the view represented by Gombrich exists within Indology in multidimensional fashion, and has had the impact of reinforcing a one-directional reading of the apparent affiliation between Sanskrit and orthodoxy.⁹⁶ As magisterial as the enquiries of the last century have indeed been, it seems there is yet more to be recovered from Sanskrit texts. This is not to level opprobrium at Indologists specifically, but to draw attentive care to a significant catch involved in some of the assumptions about language that underpin current approaches to the study of this literature. In holding onto the definitively postmodern conclusion that it is language which structures society and not the other way around, scholars have re-engineered Sanskrit as an object of analysis and enforced a limitation on their own critical endeavour: as the parameters of what constitutes language are narrowed, texts can only be assessed on the basis of categorically commensurate data, which in this case means texts about knowledge about language.⁹⁷ What is lost from sight are human and cultural phenomena that might be considered uncivilized, abnormal, and epistemologically aberrant by śāstric and modern standards alike, but which

⁹⁴ F. Smith 2006a: 8.

⁹⁵ Gombrich 1988: 37. As F. Smith (2006a: 8) states in response to this, “what [Gombrich is] doubtless referring to are the official brahmanical doctrines espoused by the literary elite for the past two or three millennia, as they appear in the normative *dharmaśāstra* texts and philosophical *darśanas*. In this sense, Gombrich is correct in noting the importance of “brahmanism” in delimiting the parameters of control, self-awareness, and the self as a single discrete independent entity.”

⁹⁶ For example, see Bhalla 1964: 39-40; Gombrich 1988: 37, 64, 145; Heesterman 1985, 1993; and Pollock 2006: 96-99. De Caroli (2004: 9-10) and Shulman (2001: 82) are both inclined to disagree with this interpretation of events.

⁹⁷ Habermas 1971: 314; cf. Kristeva 1989: 3: “the conception of language as the ‘key’ to man and to social history and as the means of access to the laws of societal functioning constitutes perhaps one of the most striking characteristics of our era, and as such is definitely a new phenomenon.” For a discussion of assimilative cross-cultural intellectual engagement generally, along with particular focus on South Asia, see Dallmayr 1996.

decades of ethnographic and anthropological research have established as cornerstones of South Asia's religious culture. The relevance of these findings for India's history has been confirmed in recent years by a number of religious and textual historians, who point out that the "unwritten rules" of śāstric texts "discourage discussion of personal experience except as a mythical, fictional, or paradigmatic figure might have a paradigmatic experience."⁹⁸ In other words, where the sociopolitical valence of Sanskrit has been amply studied with reference to the intellectual traditions and philosophical *darśanas* of the Common Era, the relative positioning of language and person in mid-Vedic cosmological visions, together with the behavioural and ritual environments perforce required, is a consideration that ties more strongly to the religious culture of seventh- to fifth-century BCE South Asia than it does to the metaphysical civilization of a small cadre of Sanskrit-using intellectuals.⁹⁹

By contrast, a perspective on Brahmins and religious culture that instead sees diversity within and engagement between *darśana*-based and popular cultures allows for the generation of potentially far broader definitions by factoring in a wide sample of evidence drawn from a range of disciplines and methods either represented within or closely affiliated with modern Indology. In sharp distinction to the mainstream picture of Sanskrit that has emerged based on the rarefied domain of Sanskrit's literary culture combined with sociolinguistic theories, evidence uncovered through religious anthropologies and ethnographic accounts places linguistic practices involving Sanskrit into a much wider field of cultural phenomena. The principles underlying traditions and practices that have commonly been perceived as antithetical or opposed to Brahmanical orthodoxy can, as a result of viewing anthropological and ethnographic study alongside textual analysis, be seen as related to, if not actively embraced by, the Sanskrit-based religious culture of the Vedic period. And it is this widening of the parameters currently ascribed to early Brahmanical culture, the development of a more inclusive context, that reveals the complexity and scope of Sanskrit as a

⁹⁸ F. Smith 2006a: 5.

⁹⁹ Following the distinction made in White 2003: 3: "While it is the case that [the] elites – the brahmin intelligentsia, a certain Indian aristocracy, and the merchant classes – have been the historical bearers of much of Indian religious *civilization*, their texts and temples have had limited impact on the religious *culture* of the vast majority of South Asians." Italics original.

meaningful reality known through human experience, that has purchase beyond the rule-based intellectual structures of grammar and exegesis, and whose deeper meanings may be retrieved from the non-semantic textures of self-transformative experience that are embedded throughout revelatory texts. It is to these patterns and their conflictive role in the modern characterization of the Āraṇyakas that we turn in the following chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

From Language to the Āraṇyakas

*We can't solve problems using the same kind of thinking
we used when we created them.*

ALBERT EINSTEIN

Despite the fact that over a century has passed since they were first taken up by modern scholars, the Āraṇyakas remain scarcely familiar even within the specialist circle of Vedic Studies. While this fact alone places them in stark contrast to the Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads, their family corpora of related texts and some of the earliest evidence for India's ancient sociolinguistic past, it might be said without exaggeration that these circumstances are the result of the leading organizational approaches adopted in the classification of the Vedic canon and its internal divisions. More specifically, this chapter argues, the common perception of the Āraṇyakas as aberrantly eclectic texts or convenient repositories for otherwise undesignated materials has developed from a long-standing tendency to benignly ignore the grounds on which they are traditionally recognized to form a separate class: the indigenous claim that the appellation *āraṇyaka*, “wilderness (book),” indicates that the esoteric contents of these texts should be studied away from the boundaries of human settlement loses its substance in light of modern considerations of what defines genre, while its casual acceptance as a point of belief rather than epistemology has prevented its inclusion in methodological frameworks of analysis.

To whatever extent modern perceptions of the Āraṇyakas are justified by the practice of working within the empirically observable features of textual style, structure, and content, the point remains that the divergence between traditional and current orientations should not automatically preclude consideration of

alternative approaches to definition, but instead might reopen the interlocking questions of what constitutes sufficient grounds for inclusion in these texts and how this reflects the cultural textures and dynamics of Vedic revelation. The present chapter attempts to account for the difference in these etic and emic views by means of an examination of the analytical procedures that contribute to the appearance of difficulties in interpretation and, moreover, frame these as inconsistencies inherent to the *Āraṇyakas* rather than as correctable symptoms of a need for revised approaches to definition. This necessarily involves the same point of departure as that taken in other studies, namely, asking the question of whether there is something that quantifiably distinguishes the *Āraṇyakas* from the closely-related texts that surround them, that would provide them with a clear pivot upon which a picture of genre could be constructed. However, unlike other studies, this chapter questions whether such a textual identifier (assuming for a moment that it does indeed exist) must necessarily be stylistically constant in order to be definitive, or whether it is possible for continuity to be located behind the discontinuities on the surface of these texts, in which case it would generate the conditions for variations in style and structure – and conversely render these inconsistencies a valuable source of information in an inductive approach to the study of the *Āraṇyakas* as instances of revelation. What is not attempted here, therefore, is to produce a definition of the *Āraṇyakas* based either on their positioning within the Veda or on a comparison between those texts belonging to the *Ṛgvedic* and *Yajurvedic* lineages respectively. Not only are comprehensive overviews of the Vedic corpus readily available, but to repeat procedures previously undertaken is unlikely to yield fresh insights with which to begin filling the lacuna these texts represent in our understanding of Vedic religious culture. Instead, we consider the possibilities of incorporating the soteriological dimensions of language into a modern typologization of the *Āraṇyakas*, and examine the reasons for which this has not already been done.

Definitions, Typologies, and Linguistic Structures

As stated above, the *Āraṇyakas* have largely eluded modern efforts at definition in their reflection of a broad array of interests, concerns, and linguistic developments that blur the lines demarcating them from the texts they directly follow and precede, namely, the *Brāhmaṇas* and *Upaniṣads*. From both philological and literary critical perspectives, these considerations render their indigenous acknowledgement as a singular division of the *Veda* unsatisfactory; thus, while the *Āraṇyakas* ostensibly comprise the smallest group of canonical texts, the modern enumeration of them is unclear at best and implicates contradictory criteria for inclusion. These spiralling attempts to reach a definitive identification of the *Āraṇyakas* shed light on the influence of cultural conceptualizations of language upon subsequent practices of textual analysis, and raise the question of whether our inherited modern understandings are appropriate to the task at hand. It is thus to a review of the leading interpretations of the *Āraṇyakas* that we now turn.

The working depiction of the *Āraṇyakas* currently favoured by Indologists presents a group of four texts related by appellation, antiquity, and eclecticism of content, namely, the *Ṛgvedic Aitareya* and *Śāṅkhāyana* (or *Kauṣītaki*) *Āraṇyakas* and the *Taittirīya* and *Kaṭha* *Āraṇyakas* of the *Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda*. While this particular enumeration has been standardized by the availability of published editions and translations of these texts,¹⁰⁰ it belies the uncertainty that underscores modern literature on the subject. According to Rājendralālā Mitra's 1872 edition of the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka*, six texts belong to the class: in addition to the *Kṛṣṇa Yajurvedic Taittirīya* that provides the focus of his study and the two *Ṛgvedic Āraṇyakas* just mentioned, he includes the *Śukla Yajurvedic Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* and makes further reference to two texts belonging to the *Sāmaveda*, but leaves them unnamed.¹⁰¹ While Mitra does not offer any explanation of his reasoning behind these latter inclusions, it may be induced from an observation

¹⁰⁰ With the exception of Keith (1909, 1918), the majority of editions in European languages are partial and focus only on what is considered to be the oldest section of each text. See: Houben 1991 (as *Pravargya Brāhmaṇa*); Malamoud 1977; Witzel 2004.

¹⁰¹ Mitra 1872: n.p.

offered by Oldenburg, nearly half a century later, that such additions to the genre likely stem from the interpretation of the term *āraṇyaka*. In the words of Oldenburg, the early Upaniṣads were “attributed to the Āraṇyakas and not denoted Āraṇyakas. For there were also forest-parts of the liturgic [*sic*] texts (Saṃhitās) in the Āraṇyaka collections beside these forest-sections of the Brāhmaṇas.”¹⁰² To this might be added the extended enumeration of no less than nine texts advanced by Jan Gonda roughly a century after Mitra. Gonda identifies the following: the core group of four Āraṇyakas belonging to the *Ṛgveda* and *Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda* respectively; the *Āraṇyakakāṇḍa* (“Forest Chapter”) of the Mādhyam̐dina recension of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, belonging to the *Śukla Yajurveda* and containing within it the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*; and, for the *Sāmaveda*, the *Āraṇyagāṇa* and *Āraṇyaka Saṃhitā* of the Kauthuma recension, the *Jaiminīya Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa* of the Talavakāra (Jaiminīya) recension, and the first section of the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* of the Tāṇḍya recension.¹⁰³ These instances are characterised, firstly, by the addition of all canonical texts that bear the term *āraṇyaka* in their appellation, and secondly by an implicit acknowledgement of this term as denoting a relationship to the wilderness. As seen in Gonda’s account, this allows for an inclusion by extension of texts whose internal features are suggestive of a similarly secretive context of composition and performance; furthermore, whether intentionally or unintentionally, it also allows for the attribution of at least one functional “Āraṇyaka” to each in a majority of Vedic lineages.

This pattern of alternatively negotiating the openness of the terms on which a picture of the genre is constructed is not peculiar to older scholarship. In 1983, the well-known Vedic scholar, Frits Staal, included in an overview of the Vedas only those texts explicitly named as Āraṇyakas, thus seeming to reduce the class back to the core collection of four texts.¹⁰⁴ However, he elsewhere positions the Āraṇyakas within a broader division of materials identified as *araṇyageyagāna*, “songs to be sung in the forest.”¹⁰⁵ Echoing a suggestion

¹⁰² Oldenburg [1915] 1991: 87.

¹⁰³ Gonda 1975: 424, 430-31.

¹⁰⁴ Staal 1983: 36.

¹⁰⁵ Staal 1996: 297.

implicit in the work of both Mitra and Oldenburg, this delineation between the categories of *araṇyageyagāna* and *grāmageyagāna* (“songs to be sung in the village”) is ostensibly based on the internal structure of the *Sāmaveda Saṃhitā*, from which Staal extrapolates a division within ritual application (*prayoga*) that he further asserts is culturally normative throughout Vedic tradition.¹⁰⁶

Evidence for this performance-based account of textual classifications would, one might assume, be reinforced by traditional descriptions of the *Āraṇyakas* as *rahasya*, or secret.¹⁰⁷ To the extent, however, that it is commonly applied to a variety of otherwise distinct materials, it goes only a short way towards precisely elucidating what differentiates *Āraṇyakas* from either *Brāhmaṇas* or *Upaniṣads*. Where on one hand, then, scholars face the highly restrictive scenario of a small group of texts whose sole exclusively distinguishing feature is the name *Āraṇyaka*, on the other we encounter a description that is applicable to point of not defining any one genre at all. Writing in 1992, Jamison and Witzel attempt to provide *āraṇyaka* with a denominative centre by employing an inclusive combination of criteria spanning appellation and application, in conjunction with secrecy of ritual and characteristic strangeness of content. After recalling the fact that, unlike in the case of the *Ṛgvedic* and *Kṛṣṇa Yajurvedic* schools, the traditions of the *Sāmaveda* and *Atharvaveda* do not possess any texts that are explicitly named *Āraṇyakas*, Jamison and Witzel assert the following:

the Jaiminīya Upaniṣad *Brāhmaṇa* may, in part, be regarded as the [*Āraṇyaka*] of [the *Sāmaveda*], and the Gopatha-*Brāhmaṇa* plays the same role for the AV [*Atharvaveda*]. In addition, the first part of Kāṇḍa 14 of the Śatapatha-*Brāhmaṇa*, which deals with the Pravargya ritual (ŚB 14.1-3), may with good reason be called the *Ār.* of the Mādhyandina school of the White [*Śukla*] YV, for all three *Ār.* texts of the YV deal centrally with this ritual. Its performance and even its acquisition by learning is regarded as too dangerous to be carried out inside the village and has to be done “where the houses of the village cannot be seen any more.” This points to the correct meaning of the designation *Ār.*, from *araṇya* “wilderness” which curiously still eludes most modern Sanskritists though it was established long ago by Oldenburg (1915-16). This oversight also clouds the understanding of the type of texts the *Ār.* constitute. They are not, as

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.: 315.

¹⁰⁷ See Jamison and Brereton 2014: 367 (vol. 1); also Jamison and Witzel 1992: 12.

medieval Hindu tradition asserts, the texts of the third stage in life, the Vānaprastha, but deal, quite in the fashion of other Brāhmaṇa type texts, with a particular ritual. In the case of the RV it is the Mahāvratā day of the year long Gavām Ayana and some other rituals.¹⁰⁸

While some of the finer details of this interpretation vary from those given by other scholars, Gonda and Olivelle among them, the more significant point is that what Jamison and Witzel do is establish the ritual that accounts for the leading preoccupation of each text, and also importantly constitutes one of the more secret teachings of its respective *śākhā* or lineage, as a necessary condition of inclusion in the category of *Āraṇyaka*.¹⁰⁹ Considered together with the practical impetus suggested by *āraṇyaka*, the attention paid to ritual generates a strong but flexible combination of determinative characteristics that are able to account for both those texts explicitly named *Āraṇyakas* and those that lack this appellation yet appear to serve a similar function, whilst at the same time preserving the distinction between the two. Furthermore, although it is firmly grounded in the methods of philology – a tradition that has come into criticism in the last decade – Jamison and Witzel’s insistence upon the restrictive and mutual connection between the rituals described, these texts, and the performance environment results in a considerably more comprehensive description of the *Āraṇyakas* than most. This is because it provides the characteristic of *rahasya* with a substantial basis in the behaviours or practices that both surround the treatment of the texts and are described within them, while their apparent attribution of a culturally normative status to the dangers inherent in these rituals allows for a sophisticated mediation of emic and etic perspectives.

That said, it needs to be pointed out that Jamison and Witzel’s definition applies to those parts of the texts alone that directly address the rituals in question, and thus includes in its purview only the minority percentage of the texts’ contents – their oldest strata – and not the entire form in which they have been transmitted. To understand this as an hermeneutic equation of age with

¹⁰⁸ Jamison and Witzel 1992: 11-12.

¹⁰⁹ Gonda identifies *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 14.4-9, rather than 1-3 (1975: 430-431). Olivelle parts ways with both Gonda and Jamison and Witzel in his classification of the Sāmavedic *Chāndogya* and *Jaiminīya Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa* as Upaniṣads in entirety; this, however, is in keeping with the primary trend of scholarship on the Upaniṣads; see Olivelle 1998: 29.

authenticity would, I believe, be a mistake. Rather, Jamison and Witzel's conclusions arguably demonstrate the operative terms of a lexical approach to definition, which in this instance combine with philological methods to produce a strict linguistic and chronological differentiation between the diverse materials from which the Āraṇyakas are comprised. In accordance with the exclusive terms on which such a definition is built, the separation, firstly, of those sections that are designated as Upaniṣads and, secondly, of the varied selection of materials that have been added at later dates is justified on the grounds of structure, style, and content, and is further supported both by the independent commentarial traditions that in some cases surround these materials and also by their wide representation or parallel appearance elsewhere. The removal of these from immediate consideration – or, more precisely, their subjection to independent processes of definition – thus allows for the conception of an original nucleus, whose qualities alone become definitive of the Āraṇyakas, surrounded by a variety of inconsistent materials that do not satisfy class requirements. In the words of Jamison and Witzel:

The *veda-* (or *mantra* or *saṃhitā-*) text-type consists of collections of liturgical materials, the *brāhmaṇa-*text-type of ritual exegesis. The *āraṇyaka-*text-type often develops the cosmic side of *brāhmaṇa* explanations into esoteric speculation about some of the more cryptic and secret of the rituals and generally has served as a catch-all for the later texts of the particular school involved. The *upaniṣad-*text-type proceeds further on this speculative path.¹¹⁰

Although such processes of identification on one hand reflect the internal divisions evidenced by these texts in their transmitted forms, it introduces strict chronological and stylistic considerations that come to circumscribe the Āraṇyakas exclusively on the basis of their Brāhmaṇa-like linguistic features and ritual concerns. Support for this is once again found in the form of philological evidence; Jamison and Witzel continue:

First of all, as has been pointed out above, there is no inherent difference in content and style between Brāhmaṇa and Āraṇyaka texts: both deal with rituals, although the Āraṇyakas deal with the more secret rituals such as

¹¹⁰ Jamison and Witzel 1992: 5; cf. comments in Witzel 2004: xxx.

the Mahāvratā (in the RV) and the Pravargya (in the YV Āraṇyakas). Both rituals indeed are explained in the usual Brāhmaṇa style...¹¹¹

Viewed from this perspective, the only feature to uniquely distinguish the Āraṇyakas from the Brāhmaṇas is the dangerousness attributed to the rituals they describe. Given that this quality is not typically considered to be empirically observable, and as such does not provide a sufficiently rigorous basis for testing, analytical priority is ascribed to linguistic characteristics over the affective impact suggested by *rahasya*, to the end that the variability of the Āraṇyakas' contents is seen at once as being neither similar enough to establish a picture of internal coherence when considered in entirety, nor differentiated enough from the Brāhmaṇas to establish an independent class of texts when separated.¹¹² Although the historical precision of such an assessment is without doubt, its contribution to the understanding of the Āraṇyakas is constrained by its belying of the cultural significance of these texts in their complete forms; furthermore, the strictness of their identification with the Brāhmaṇas obscures the fact that the substance of the Āraṇyakas' traditional acknowledgement as a unique expression of the Vedic revelation is not here addressed. To anticipate an argument that will be examined in detail below, I contend that the price of establishing this coherence is a dramatic and unnecessary loss of detail, an elision of differences and inconsistencies that should contribute to a deeper sensitivity to what makes for an Āraṇyaka as such, in short, of the underlying patterns of coherence and integrity that may well account for why the various sections of these texts were put together and kept together in precisely this way as attested by a remarkably unbroken manuscript tradition.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Jamison and Witzel 1992: 73; cf. Jamison 1991: 9: “[The āraṇyaka-]text type develops the cosmic side of brāhmaṇa explanations into esoteric speculation about some of the more cryptic of the rituals. In certain ways, the āraṇyaka-text type seems like a lopsided brāhmaṇa with a mystic bent.”

¹¹² Michael Witzel has generously clarified this analysis (personal communication; 13 February 2012). As to the suggestion that the Āraṇyakas be seen as a unique class of texts, Witzel responds that this “impression may be shaped by the many additional sections (even Upaniṣads) in these texts, especially the RV Āraṇyakas with their grammatical discussions. And of course [by] the traditional division of the Vedas into 4 levels, which leaves out the truly Vedic (early) Sūtras.”

¹¹³ Gonda (1975: 424, 427) with reference to the AitĀ; it appears that he follows Keith in this matter. See comments in Keith (1909: 1): “Variant readings occur here and there, but none of sufficient importance to justify the idea that any different recensions of the text ever existed, and it is hardly ever possible to feel serious doubt as to the correct reading. What is especially important

Vedic Watersheds

While the positioning of the *Āraṇyakas* in relation to the *Brāhmaṇas* and *Upaniṣads* can lead to their clouding by these far better-known divisions of the *Veda*, the same chronological factors also make the *Āraṇyakas* a readily appropriated point of reference in the study of developments undergone by Brahmanical religious culture during the mid- to late-Vedic period. The most productive starting-point for such approaches is to see the evidential basis provided by the texts themselves; we therefore commence with an overview of the five books that comprise the *Aitareya Āraṇyaka* [henceforth *AitĀ*] according to its manuscript tradition.

- 1.1-5 Dated to circa 700 BCE.¹¹⁴ These sections describe the recitations and activities that accompany the performance of the *Mahāvratā* in the context of their hidden connections and esoteric meanings. Emphasis is placed on the two corresponding recitations that accompany the midday libation of soma, namely, the *Mahāvratā Sāman* and the *Mahaduktha*, the recitation of which is apportioned to correspond to the shape of a bird. The linguistic style of this book is characterised by its similarity to that of the *Brāhmaṇas*.¹¹⁵
- 2.1-3 ca. 700-600 BCE. The first three sections of *AitĀ* 2 continue the discussion of the *Mahaduktha*, which is identified as *prāṇa* or *puruṣa*. Section 2.3.8 contains a set of five embedded verses that describe the bodily senses as yoked horses or steeds (*yujo yukta*) and suggestively links *prāṇa* and the subtle dimensions of speech, *vāc*, to the truth of identity. Keith suggests these verses are earlier than the surrounding prose and notes their similarity to those given in *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.6.23 and *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2.8.¹¹⁶ These three sections, *AitĀ* 2.1-3, are formally considered an *Upaniṣad* by the native tradition, according to which the entirety of

is that MSS. from both the extreme north – as Bühler’s MS. from Kashmir – and the south agree in presenting the same text. Further, the commentary of Sāyaṇa presents the same text as the commentaries of Śaṅkara on Books II and III, and of Ānandatīrtha and Viśveśvara on the same books.” Keith consulted a total of 38 manuscripts, partial and complete, with a date range from 1575 (ms. B, from Kashmir) to 1885 (ms. T, Andhra Pradesh), and written in Grantha, Śāradā, Telugu and Malayālam with the majority in Devanāgarī.

¹¹⁴ I follow the dates given in Keith’s (1909) introduction to this text.

¹¹⁵ Note Keith 1909: 51: “*Āraṇyaka* I contains, in comparison with the *Upaniṣads*, little of philosophic interest. It is important, however, to observe that in it *brahman* appears already as a principle of unity.”

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*: 223, n.1.

- AitĀ 2 may be referred to as either the *Mahaitareya* or *Bahvṛcabrāhmaṇa Upaniṣad*.
- 2.4-6 ca. 700-600 BCE; the “Upaniṣad *par excellence*” according to Keith, who also refers to these sections as containing the *Aitareya Upaniṣad* “proper” in contrast to the native typology.¹¹⁷ AitĀ 2.4-6 is formally counted among the early or classical Upaniṣads and as such possesses an independent commentarial tradition; as Olivelle notes, however, the distinction is “somewhat artificial, there being little difference in the topics covered” by 2.1-3 and 2.4-6 respectively.¹¹⁸ That said, AitĀ 2.4-6 is characterised particularly by its narrative style and its focus on the true identity of the *ātman*, both of which resonate more obviously with the Upaniṣads of other *śākhās* than with AitĀ 1.
- 3.1-2 6th century BCE. This book of the AitĀ identifies itself as the *Samhitā Upaniṣad*, an appellation which corresponds to its focus on the esoteric meanings of the phenomenon of *saṃhitā*, or euphonic combination, and its connection to the transformative qualities of the *Ṛgveda Samhitā*. The two *adhyaṅgas* of AitĀ 3 are divided into six sections apiece; in addition to metaphysical discussions of *saṃhitā*, the latter half also details the symptoms of impending death of one who has “no part in language” (*na tasya vācy api bhāgo asti*) and a corresponding ritual for the preservation of life. AitĀ 3.2.5 further identifies itself as an Upaniṣad conducing to the whole of language (*sarvasyai vāca upaniṣat*) and identifies the corporeal body with a divine lute or *daivī vīṇā*.
- 4 ca. 500-450 BCE. AitĀ 4 consists of a single invocation known as the *Mahānāmnī* and comprising nine verses to Indra followed by a final tenth verse that names Indra alongside the gods Agni, Viṣṇu, and Pūṣan. The 13th century commentator, Sāyaṇa, explains the presence of these verses by stating that they must be studied in the forest (*araṇyādhyayanārthā vai procyante ’tha caturthake*).¹¹⁹ Parallel occurrences of the *Mahānāmnī* are found in the *Āraṇya Samhitā* and *Naigeya Śākhā* of the *Śukla Yajurveda Samhitā*, and also as one of the *khilas* or compendiums associated with the *Ṛgveda*. According to Keith, they are also referred to in *Bṛhaddevatā* 8.100, *Śāṅkhāyana Śrauta Sūtra* 10.6.10, *Ṛgvidhāna* 4.25, and *Śāṅkhāyana Gṛhya Sūtra* 4.5.9. Their dating is uncertain; the version preserved in the AitĀ attests rare Vedic forms but shows more recent modification to metre.¹²⁰
- 5.1-3 ca. 500-450 BCE. This final book of the AitĀ consists in major part of a *sūtra*-style description of the Mahaduktha recitation and ritual activities as per the account given in AitĀ 1. This leads Keith to state that AitĀ 5 forms “a sort of complement to Book [Āraṇyaka]

¹¹⁷ Ibid.: 17.

¹¹⁸ Olivelle 1998: 314.

¹¹⁹ Phaḍke 1898: 230.

¹²⁰ See discussion of the verses in Keith 1909: 258-61.

I, which is the Brāhmaṇa as contrasted with the Sūtra.”¹²¹ The final passage, AitĀ 5.3.3, sets forth exceptions regarding who is permitted to recite the Mahāvratā and contains an extensive outline of the rules of Vedic study (*svādhyāyadharmā*).

As discussed above, the integration of this assortment of materials into the single text of the AitĀ is suggestive of a gradual process of addition that reflects the changing interests of Brahmanical cultures through the steady development of compositional styles and, subsequently, of textual taxonomies. Although these details accurately document the positioning of the texts in relation to the development of the Vedic canon over a number of centuries, characterisations of the Āraṇyakas as interstitial must usually be understood as contributions to wider interpretations that focus on the socio-religious processes involved in the transition between the Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads. Gonda’s observations aptly summarise the basis upon which this picture of the Āraṇyakas’ relevance to the ambient environment is built. He states:

The structure of the *āraṇyakas* is as little homogenous as their contents. Some portions have the character of a *saṃhitā*, others of a *brāhmaṇa*, others again of a *sūtra*, according to the material that, varying from Veda to Veda, and from school to school, was collected in an *āraṇyaka* corpus. Linguistically and stylistically also, these works form a transition between the *brāhmaṇas* proper and the speculative literature that follows them and develops part of the ideas and lines of thought which are characteristic of them.¹²²

The details cited by Gonda fix the Āraṇyakas within the parameters of an historical overview that interprets the significance of their contents’ heterogeneity in accordance with external sources of meaning. In so doing, their apparent lack of internal continuity is ascribed conceptual value as a legitimate expression of cultural transformation, as opposed to being reduced to an ad hoc by-product of the decision-making processes and conveniences involved in textual transmission.¹²³

¹²¹ Ibid.: 18.

¹²² Gonda 1975: 424.

¹²³ Ibid.: 423: “There can...be no doubt that in course of time the tendency was for the explanation contained in the definite portions of the brāhmaṇas to develop into explanations of meta-ritualism,

Although many earlier examples of such interpretation – including among them the now-classical histories of Indian philosophy given by Surendranath Dasgupta and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan – have now been effectively undermined by recent studies showing the *āśrama* system to be a neologism,¹²⁴ the tendency to approach the Āraṇyakas in connection to inexplicitly related religious practices has retained currency especially in attempts to map developments occurring in the period between the compositions of the Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads. One of the better examples of this hermeneutic approach, which typically aims to elucidate points of evolving divergence between these largely oppositional texts of Vedic religious culture, is Mahoney’s depiction of the Āraṇyakas as reflecting the teachings and, inadvertently, the living circumstances of early renunciant communities. He states:

As early as the ninth century BCE, small groups of people began to leave the life of the villages to meditate in the forest, where, unwilling or financially unable to perform the grand and expensive public rituals, they contemplated the nature of the various homologies and equivalences between divine and human as well as outer and inner worlds. Their teachings formed the basis of texts known as the Āraṇyakas (“forest-books”). The generally mystical perspective driving the composition of the Āraṇyakas came to fuller expression beginning as early as the eighth century BCE, when the earliest collections of another genre of contemplative texts, the Upaniṣads (“secret teachings, mystic doctrines”), first passed through the generations.¹²⁵

While Mahoney’s deferral to a rather sweeping view of the divisions in mid-Vedic society is not positioned to account for the intricacies internally characterising the Āraṇyakas, his description raises a number of considerations that bear centrally upon the way these texts are understood in relation to

and then to grow independent of the ritual until the stage was reached where the name *āraṇyaka* was no longer applicable, because the subject matter had passed into that of an *upaniṣad*.”

¹²⁴ Olivelle 1993: 8, 31-32; cf. Bodewitz 1973: 237: “The *araṇya* in opposition to the village or town denotes the secret, esoteric sphere rather than a permanent habitation and therefore has no relation with the *āśrama* system.” For examples of romantic perceptions of *āśrama*, see Macdonald 1901: 39-40, Dasgupta [1922] 1969: 14, and Radhakrishnan [1923] 1999: 65. Madeline Biarreau provides a more recent argument for a direct correlation between the Āraṇyakas and the *vānaprastha* or forest-dwelling stage in the life of a practitioner (Biarreau 1989: 31); furthermore, her invocation of the *prāṇāgnihotra* as evidence is anachronistic (cf. Bodewitz 1973: 238-40, 318).

¹²⁵ Mahoney 1998: 10.

soteriological practice. Drawing upon Mahoney’s suggestion of a renunciant community of practitioners whose focus, while functionally grounded in techniques of meditation, was oriented around orthodox Brahmanical rituals, it might be surmised that the affiliation he forges between the *aranya* as form of identity marker and the sociology of the texts makes reference not to the third, forest-dwelling (*vānaprastha*) stage in the formalized sequence of *āśrama*, but rather to the earlier demographic of Brahmanical renunciants or semi-renunciants known likewise as *vānaprastha* and distinguished from other ascetic communities by their maintenance of a ritual fire and stated goal of achieving heavenly rebirth.¹²⁶ If this is accurate, Mahoney adheres to a revised historical model, established particularly through the works of Bronkhorst and Olivelle, that convincingly argues for the existence of multiple variations and traditions within Brahmanical culture that were obscured through the normativising effects of textual reinterpretation by later orthodox scholars. While the conclusion he reaches differs fundamentally from that offered by Mahoney, Jan Heesterman similarly posits a common denominator between the texts’ contents and religious practice outside of the settled community in his assertion that the intended reference of the term *āranyaka* is not “as has erroneously been thought, the life of the ascetic (*vānaprastha*), but of the nomadic warriors of old setting out with their fires and cattle into the wilderness.”¹²⁷ In this, Heesterman attends to particularities of the Mahāvratā that place both it and the *Āraṇyakas* on the social – and canonical – periphery through their ostensible association with the Vrātyas, groups of young men in Vedic society who, as described by Samuel, had “a specific ritual function” involving “the performance of extended midwinter sacrificial rituals out in the forest, away from the village community, on behalf of the community as a whole.”¹²⁸ For example, and most obviously, the Mahāvratā occurs on the mid-winter solstice and concords with the wintertime culmination of the Vrātyas’ year-long ritual activity (AitĀ 1.1.1: *etad vā ahar īpsantaḥ*

¹²⁶ Samuel 2008: 122-23; Olivelle 2003: 272; Bronkhorst 1998.

¹²⁷ Heesterman 1987: 1028 (*Encyclopedia of Religion* 2nd ed., s.v. “Brāhmaṇas and Āraṇyakas”).

¹²⁸ Samuel 2008: 115. While research on the Vrātyas remains slim, what does appear to be well attested is that Mahāvratā was their domain, at least up to some point in history (ibid.: 158). However, most such scholarship does not address the AitĀ and ŚāṅkhĀ, but focuses on the explicit references contained in other mid-Vedic texts.

saṃvatsaram āsate ta āgacchanti, “desiring this day they worship the year [and now] come close to it”). Further, it is classified as a *sattra*, a term whose general usage refers to a variety of soma offering but which in specific application refers to rites performed in the wilderness by Vṛātyas;¹²⁹ and to this might be added their shared association with the god Indra, and the sexually transgressive and polluting behaviours that have linked each to speculation about the early developments of yogic practices and Tantra.¹³⁰

As with the case of allusions to evidence of *vānaprastha*-type practice, however, these social associations are presently of little practical use for they do not so much expand the basis of textual interpretation as simply relocate the Āraṇyakas between competing cultural frames without addressing the matter of how their heterogeneity intersects meaningfully with or operates as a significant expression of – or, indeed, is permitted by – the principles underpinning their emic status. Although the absence of sustained research into the Āraṇyakas certainly contributes to this situation, I would here forward the observation that it is equally informed by limitations inherent in mainstream academic approaches to religious experience and its classification.

Ritual, Realization, and Competing Contexts

Before pursuing the matter of experience further, it is firstly necessary to discuss the major specifications outlining the Āraṇyakas as religious texts, which is to say as participating fully and not nominally in the revelation of the Veda. Because the underlying understanding of this, the emic or indigenous view, is that it is a matter of belief or – perhaps more sympathetically – non-ordinary perception that is not available to empirical examination by outsiders, the veridical status of revelation is rarely treated as a direct object of study, being instead positioned as epiphenomenal to the social and practical contexts that are commonly foregrounded in academic theorizing about mid-Vedic religion.

¹²⁹ Samuel 2008: 114-16; White 1991: 95-96; Keith 1908: 85.

¹³⁰ Samuel 2008: 158-59; White 2003: 30-31; Jamison 1996: 244; Deeg 1993: 130-36.

Samhitās aside, the primary plot of evolutions in India’s ancient religious culture has generally been mapped in relation to two poles – the first being the ritualistic cosmology of the Brāhmaṇas, and the second the metaphysical enquiry of the early Upaniṣads – that mirror the post-Vedic exegetical division of the Veda along the soteriological axes of *karma*, ritual activity, and *jñāna*, liberating knowledge. While the vision of incommensurable opposition that once coloured the grounds of comparison between these groups of texts has undergone radical tempering since the mid-twentieth century, the classical tension between *karma* and *jñāna* remains influential particularly in its suggestion of an intrinsic internal separation of the Veda into sections (*kāṇḍa*) according to path (*mārga*) or mode of spiritual practice. Kaebler aptly summarizes the generally accepted view of this historical phenomenon:

Knowledge, once a focus in tandem with ritual action, becomes the primary focus of an entire Vedic tradition. It is important to realize, however, that action, too, becomes the centre of its own tradition or trend. The two diverge, therefore, each becoming a focus around which two differing, though interrelated, constellations of thought and behaviour revolve. It is in this regard that we speak of a Vedic watershed. Two trends begin to diverge in Vedic thought, once centred in *jñāna*, the other in *karma*.¹³¹

Salient to our purposes is a pertinent corollary of this differentiation, namely, its bearing upon the interpretation of each group of texts in association with a correspondingly distinguished mode of soteriological practice, and thence community identity, as implicated in the details of textual composition itself. Restated, what is perceived to be contained in the classifications of *karma* and *jñāna* is a mutuality of text-type and religious system, a definitive correlation between the variety of instruction (ritualistic or contemplative) articulated in the contents of the texts and the variety of behaviour assumed of the human subjects originally involved in the composition, transmission, and study of these materials.¹³² Correspondingly, these affiliations locate a meaningful performative

¹³¹ Kaebler 1981: 74; cf. Samuel 2008: 159-60.

¹³² Holdrege 1996: 343: “cosmogonic and epistemological paradigms associated with Veda [*sic*]...are reflected in practices with respect to the methods of transmission, study, and appropriation...”

centre for soteriological practice in the very linguistic features that characterize the Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads in opposition to each other – for example, in the recitation of *mantras* and ritual directives by a group whose multiple participants are predetermined by socially encoded relations, as contrasted against the individual realization of esoteric connections through various meditative and ascetic practices. Such distinguishing features drive the scholarly impression of a definitive difference of substance and culture between fixed text and scripted performance, on one hand, and direct experience and individualised teaching, on the other.

Are these delineations appropriate to the cultural textures of Vedic revelation in an extended context, that is, as encompassing the spectrum of received materials that comprise the canon as a whole? In a discussion that recalls the attempt to define the Āraṇyakas on the basis of this appellation's lexical derivation from *araṇya*, Jan Houben locates the ground of an identification between genre and spiritual technique in the form of a continuum extending from the particular vocabulary employed to describe the texts in question. In thus turning to a serious consideration of the existence claims held in the traditional Sanskrit designations for these textual collections, Houben draws upon the term *brahman* as an hermeneutic touchstone, a window onto the traditional cosmology in which the disclosure of the Veda is embedded. This brings his interpretation's disciplinary basis in the etic methods of historical linguistic reconstruction into a complementary relationship with the internal view of the cosmological power of revelatory language and its involvement as a creative force in the activities of ritual. In Houben's words:

The Brāhmaṇas in the broadest sense comprise distinct sections at the end which are referred to as Āraṇyakas and Upaniṣads. The Āraṇyakas, according to the tradition to be studied in the forest or wilderness (*araṇya*), typically discuss more esoteric ritual matters, while the Upaniṣads contain spiritual teachings which are not necessarily connected with the ritual (or even have an anti-ritualistic flavour). ...In later times, the Brāhmaṇas came to be considered to be part of the Vedas, and to be as sacred as the hymns and formulas on which they commented. The name *brāhmaṇa* itself illustrates the great importance attributed to language and speech in these texts; it can be analysed as "belonging to the *brāhman*," where the word *brāhman* has as its more original meaning "sacred and

powerful formulation” or “power to formulate” (cf. Renou 1955: 12: “le pouvoir formulateur”).¹³³

Houben’s preservation of the traditional Indo-Aryan presentation of these materials informs a closer inspection of the revelatory qualities claimed of each canonical stratum in alignment with the particular cultural textures and literary development of Indo-European inheritances in South Asia. Therefore, rather than drawing a line of strict opposition between the Upaniṣads and the ritualistic compositions preceding them, he demarcates between the Saṃhitās and the evolutions of a following tradition, allowing the Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas, and Upaniṣads to be envisioned as related materials whose particularistic styles of inflection nonetheless demonstrate a common investment in the revelatory potential of language captured in these texts.

Working along similar lines to suggest that these texts then differ from each other in degree and not kind, Jamison and Witzel assert that the Upaniṣads “do not represent a break with the intellectual tradition that precedes them,”

but rather a heightened continuation of it, *using as raw material the religious practices then current*. What makes the Upaniṣads seem more different than they actually are from the Brāhmaṇas and even from the Āraṇyakas, which contain similar speculative and “mystical” material, is their style. The Brāhmaṇas and Āraṇyakas are authoritative in their presentation; even the most advanced and esoteric speculation is positively stated, as an exegetical truism. The early Upaniṣads, with their dialogue form, the personal imprint of the teacher, the questioning and admissions of innocence – or claims of knowledge – from the students, seem to reintroduce some of the uncertainties of the late RV, give the sense that the ideas are indeed speculation, different attempts to frame solutions to real puzzles.¹³⁴

This change in perspective allows for a more nuanced interpretation of the relationship between *karma* and *jñāna*, particularly with respect to the practical employment of language they each entail. While the distinctions between the Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads is basically summarized in terms of the direction in which each collection’s focus seems primarily oriented by matters of style and

¹³³ Houben 1997: 64.

¹³⁴ Jamison and Witzel 1992: 75-76; emphasis added.

content, this difference encompasses within it certain assumptions regarding performative practices of revelation.¹³⁵ More precisely, to the extent that it bears upon the immediate interpretation framing the *Āraṇyakas* in historical view, this shift allows these canonical texts to be seen as active instances of the worldviews they communicate: there is understood to be a sympathetic relationship between their theoretical and pragmatic aspects, in which the objective structure of the texts takes on the added significance of the subjective meaning that arises in terms of the transformative practices enacted by their human subjects. Although such an introduction of practical considerations into the space of language certainly advances textual interpretation in promising directions, there exists a significant inheritance of scholarly assumptions about the validity of experience that can also result in serious reductions where the creativity and subjectivity of human participants involved in ritual performance – such as that foregrounded by the *Brāhmaṇas* – is concerned. This occurs particularly when the outward orientation and repetitious nature of ritual acts are taken to indicate a less-intense mode of personal encounter and even privileging of rote memorization over direct experiences of realization. This often-unchallenged binary posits discreet models of the human subject, one structured around an exacting preservation of tradition and a conceptualization of knowledge as rigid and impersonal, the other around individualized or spontaneous behaviour and careful discernment of scripted learning from true insight; moreover, it has led to a curious discontinuity of interpretation in which the repetitive character of ascetic or meditative practice is widely held to culminate in direct experience, but the repetitive character of Vedic recitation is not.

Although written with an eye for the Buddha's critical conceptualization of Brahmanical culture, as portrayed in the Pali canon, Sue Hamilton's description of Vedic ritual during the Upaniṣadic period is a useful entry point into the way that the particulars of textual performance can implicate a denial of personal affectivity. This raises the question of to what extent such impressions arise from the manner in which these ancient materials are received or interacted with by modern scholars, that is, as written documents, apparently determinate,

¹³⁵ See the description of the Upaniṣads and their pragmatic dimensions in Brereton 1990.

passive and inert objects that are available to be read regardless of time or place, rather than as sensory events whose reception involves heightened perceptual reciprocity, restricted circumstances, and extensive prerequisite training. Hamilton, like many other scholars, identifies the unnecessariness of practitioners' insight into true meaning with the inherently powerful nature of Sanskrit itself, as a language of revelation that obviates Brahmanical ritual of any requirement of actual human understanding or subjective contribution. Viewed from this perspective – which, it must be noted, is suggestive of the rigorous epistemological standards demanded by Pūrvamīmāṃsā – the isolation of all human physiological and psycho-mental processes from the Veda equates to a positive assertion of the latter's unlimited and independent reality. Hamilton states:

The language of all the ritual instruction manuals, and the language of the verbal rituals themselves, Sanskrit, was...closely guarded by the brahmin priests. This was because it was, and still is, believed that the language of Sanskrit is intrinsically correlated to the structure of cosmic Order. Thus it was that the Sanskrit sounds uttered at the sacrifice had the consequence of maintaining, in the sense of continually re-crafting, that cosmos... The nature of the rituals was such that what their preservation required above all else was memorization: it was the action *qua* action that brought the consequence, so what mattered was that each movement or verbalized word or sound had to be accurate. Beyond believing that correctly performed rituals brought corresponding results, *meaning* was neither required nor sought.¹³⁶

Hamilton's account is suggestive of a significant separation between the speaker and the spoken text of ritual in which a Brahmin priest's possession of sacred knowledge amounts to a secondary ownership, via memorization, of a predetermined linguistic object, and thereby does not require any primary, active, or direct engagement with meaning as a prerequisite to the authenticity of verbal activity. While this may amount to a more or less accurate depiction of generalized Buddhist sentiments on the epistemological – and hence soteriological – matters of insight, knowledge, and true or honest speech, it falls short of providing a satisfactory interpretative basis on which to understand

¹³⁶ Hamilton 2000: 46.

Brahmanical practices of recitation. This is not only because it fails to address the nuanced context of the criticism, namely, its equal application to others including those of the Buddhist fold who engage in discourse without the proper basis, thus redirecting it away from its intended target in individual conduct and instead toward Vedic ritual overall. It also ignores the equivalent Brahmanical insistence on the one “who knows thus” (*ya evaṃ veda*), as it likewise does the Buddhist acknowledgement of true Brahmins who are spiritually advanced practitioners whose teaching is consonant with the authenticating requirements of direct perception.¹³⁷

Additionally, Hamilton’s summary of the relationship between person and practice does not appear to take into consideration early Indic conceptualizations of personhood and embodiment, and therefore arguably fails to accord with indigenous views of the person (*puruṣa*) as changing and constituted under the influence of all environmental conditions and activities, which would categorically include practices of recitation as a mode of self-formation.¹³⁸ It is therefore interesting to note that just as Hamilton’s assumption of a person that can exist in autonomous and unaffected isolation from their active undertakings stands in significant contrast to traditional Buddhist and Brahmanical views, it similarly diverges from the findings of modern biomedical research into embodiment and neurophysiological functions. This is because such a perspective on memorization drains the human subject of any attribution of what Damasio terms “the feeling of knowing” that arises whenever an organism is involved with the processing of an object,¹³⁹ firstly, and secondly denies that object (here, the Sanskrit language) the ability to actively provoke and engage a sensory response from those participating in recitation – in Hamilton’s words: “So used were they to the exoteric and repetitive requirements of the sacrifice, which they were able to preserve and practice so meticulously, that the necessity for experiential insight seemed beyond many of them.”¹⁴⁰ Alongside phenomenological discussions of the reciprocity between internal and external sensory milieux, modern scientific

¹³⁷ See discussion in Aklujkar 2003: 8.

¹³⁸ F. Smith 2006a: 18-23.

¹³⁹ Damasio 2000: 26. Cf. Abram 1996: 56.

¹⁴⁰ Hamilton 2000: 46.

insights again indicate that an opposing line between exoteric and esoteric may not be so easily drawn as Hamilton's comments suggest, while the characteristic of repetition promotes deeply engrained perceptual adaptations involving heightened sensitivity, awareness, and response. The implications of such findings for a revised interpretation of recitative practices and their suggestion for the significance attributed to language in cosmological traditions is further examined below.

By isolating the activity of ritualized recitation from the awareness-states of insight and understanding, Hamilton signals a characterization of genre drawn along the axes of epistemology and intentionality, or the desire to protect the *Śaṃhitās* through mechanically accurate techniques of preservation and extend control through the appropriation of mystical teachings, in opposition to an authentic interest in self-cultivation through direct experience. As a conceptual pairing, this renders human experience irrelevant to a definitive relationship between religious practice and revelatory text, and reduces the more esoteric inclusions contained in the *Brāhmaṇas* – the *Āraṇyakas* – to little more than an interested Brahmanical attempt at retaining religious dominance by the extension of “their remit from sacrificial teachings to include the teachings of yogic practices.”¹⁴¹ A similar example of scholarship in which the intertwined practices of memorization and recitation drive an hermeneutic separation of the meaningfulness of language from its basis in human being occurs in Barbara Holdrege's comparative study of the “textuality of scripture” in Brahmanical and Rabbinical traditions of revelation. As in the analysis offered by Hamilton, albeit conducted from a different orientation, Holdrege presents a case of interpretation in which the very turn to epistemology, the place of knowledge and valid perception in Brahmanical ritual, is what voids the ground of a need for personal understanding or, rather, relocates the centre of that understanding from the ritual participants to their predecessors whose revelatory visions establish the substance of the hymns contained in the *Śaṃhitās*.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. Hamilton rejects out of hand the possibility that Brahmanical religion had an underlying person-centered aspect: “by extending their remit they were able to retain religious control as their religion evolved. What this meant was that though the new yogic path was essentially about personal experience, within the Brahmanical religion it was taught by priests whether they had themselves experienced it or not.”

Beginning with the contention that form and content do not suffice to define scripture as a general category because, “in certain traditional representations of Veda and Torah, scripture is depicted not simply as a textual phenomenon but as a cosmological principle that is inherent in the very structure of reality,” Holdrege extrapolates an epistemological paradigm based on a model of relational coherence involving the ṛṣis’ cognition of the Veda and the motive force of Vāc, deified speech.¹⁴² This paradigm is intended to explore the connection between the functional historical dimensions of scripture and its cosmological status: building upon the observation that in the Saṃhitās the ṛṣis’ awareness is directly penetrated by Vāc in a process unfolding as the Veda, Holdrege contends that the Brāhmaṇas are instead distinguished by their employments of series of connections (*bandhu*) that serve to establish the sacrificial officiants as present-day counterparts of the primordial seers. As such, they are not considered to undergo personal processes of insight and revelation, but rather as continuing this project by means of appropriation. What Holdrege refers to is *vinīyoga*, a process that Jamison describes as a systematic recycling of Saṃhitā material in which *mantras* are extracted from the larger (and presumably original) context of entire hymns and applied to new ritual situations. In Jamison’s words:

the very fact that [the *mantras*] were being used and *re-used* marks a crucial shift in the ritual culture, as we assume that Rigvedic hymns were composed for each new ritual occasion... In classical Śrauta ritual, by contrast, fixed liturgies were constructed from older verbal materials, rather than being newly and freely composed. Though these liturgies often employed complete Rigvedic sūktas (especially in the long recitations known as *śāstras*), quite frequently individual ṛcs were plucked from their original context and applied to a different purpose, chosen for reasons often unrelated to their subject matter, reasons that are sometimes merely mechanical... Thus, already within the Vedic period the text of the Rig Veda had become radically deconstructed, dissolved into thousands of independent units available to be mined and recombined for other purposes. So even in its own restricted tradition the integrity of the hymn, the sūkta, was not always respected.¹⁴³

¹⁴² Holdrege 1996: 5.

¹⁴³ Jamison 2007: 53; emphasis original.

While the central problematic addressed by Jamison relates to the preference shown for the treatment of *ṛc*-based textual units over complete *sūktas* by later texts appended to the Veda, Holdrege’s concern is with the way that the ongoing re-presentation of Vedic *mantras* acquires a functionally revelatory status by means of the relational intersection between the texts’ restricted performance and their cosmological significance. The contours of this engagement of primary evidence mined from Brahmanical and Rabbinical texts with the suggestively Judeo-Christian theological distinction between original and dependent revelations informs an underlying perception of a qualitative demarcation separating the Saṃhitās from the following three phases of Vedic revelation, which Holdrege defines collectively in terms of “scripture” – a “relational category, which refers not simply to a text but to a text in relationship to a religious community for whom it is sacred and authoritative.”¹⁴⁴ The Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas, and Upaniṣads are thus unlike the primordial *mantras* and *sūktas*, the visionary disclosure of which through the medium of the *ṛṣis* is without cosmological precedent, for they take the original revelation together with its reception as a fixed point of reference while their respective receptions of it evidence ongoing transformation and change.

To the extent that this distinction emphasizes the reception of the Veda as a definitive expression of the relational dynamics that frame scripture, Holdrege’s analysis of the Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads (she does not address the Āraṇyakas specifically) centres on religious behaviours and their implications for the subsequent characterisation of each spiritual community. This boosts the perception of the fundamental irreconcilability of *karma* and *jñāna*; as she states, unlike the priests of the *karmakāṇḍa*, who appropriate revelation through reciting and hearing, the “exponents of the *jñānakāṇḍa* seek direct realization of that transcendent reality which is the source and abode of the Veda”¹⁴⁵ – a variety of reception reflected in their scriptural correlates, the Upaniṣads, which demonstrate “little concern with the earthly manifestation of the Vedic *mantras* as

¹⁴⁴ Holdrege 1996: 4. For a discussion of the theological distinction between original and dependent revelations, see Tillich 1951: 126.

¹⁴⁵ Holdrege 1996: 343.

recited texts that form a part of the sacrificial order.”¹⁴⁶ Elsewhere expanding upon this distinction, Holdrege continues to define the major preoccupation of the Brahmanical tradition as being with “*sound over meaning, memorization over understanding, and recitation over interpretation.*”¹⁴⁷ According to her explanation, this is because:

Brahmanical paradigms for the theurgic efficacy of Vedic sacrifice and recitation provide a cosmic rationale for the priority given to recitation over interpretation as the proper method of transmission and study of the Vedic *mantras*. The creative power of the Vedic *mantras* resides in their sounds, not in their discursive meaning, and thus the principle focus of the brahmin reciters must be to reproduce accurately the primordial sounds that are held to have been originally cognized and recited by the archetypal *ṛṣi*, the creator [Prajāpati] himself, in his cosmos-creating activities.¹⁴⁸

Although the analysis offered by Holdrege falls within the parameters of a broadly cosmological model of religion, her treatment of memorization and recitation as mimetic appropriations of Prajāpati’s experience of illumination rather than as affective or enactive in their own right marks a significant break with this paradigm, which on the contrary argues that the precise relationship between the archetype of the human *ṛṣis*’ proper positioning in the cosmos and the practices of Brahmanical priests serves to establish memorization and recitation as a performance of the memory of tradition, and therefore as no less personal or interior or transformative than contemplative approaches to realization.¹⁴⁹ Additionally, this selective adoption of a cosmological framework results in the prioritization of the ideological and conceptual attributes of Brahmanical ritual, masking its relationship to the fundamental emic

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.: 65.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.: 346; emphasis original.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.: 351.

¹⁴⁹ See Flood 2004: 10-11: “Cosmological religion provides a map and a route from which individual life-ways can be constructed.” This involves methods of internalization or personalization by means of which the macrocosm and its processes are found, paralleled and reflected in the microcosm and *its* processes, and are thereby ritually enacted. This enactment, which Flood terms the “performance of the memory of tradition,” is considered internalizing and ritualized whether it involves outwardly physical gestures or internal contemplative states, as both are behaviours that ultimately locate the person in appropriate relationship to the cosmos regardless of the particular attitude to ritual. In Flood’s words (ibid.): “Subjectivity and interiority recapitulate cosmology.”

understandings of human existence that render it both effective and coherent as a mode of soteriological practice that creatively reveals self and world simultaneously. As a site of engagement between revelation and the recovery of true identity, it is embodiment that directs attention back to the central problematic of language and its role in defining the Āraṇyakas.

Experience and Embodiment

One of the leading difficulties that has encumbered efforts to reach a comprehensive definition of the Āraṇyakas is, as can be detected in the accounts examined above, the ambiguity surrounding the relationship of language to experience. This is largely the result of a perceived irreconcilability of the cognitive to the non-cognitive, or of the pre-given and therefore anonymous and delimiting character of communication to the immediacy and unbounded ineffability of raw personal feeling. It will be argued here that these are conceptual constructs established upon culturally relative assumptions about language as a referential system and the human subject as a psychophysical entity, and as such are neither inevitable nor universally applicable. Rather, they are properly open to adaptation in accordance with context and the ongoing revisions suggested by modern scientific research in the form of an open-ended dialogue between emic and etic views. This is significant because, in its challenging of the cultural and intellectual biases that underpin the prevailing uniform model of language, it creates the space needed for indigenous claims to be genuinely considered rather than inadvertently dismissed.

Returning in depth now to the question of experience raised in the previous chapter, it is pertinent that a number of scholars have in recent decades brought into question the very “notion” of experience as a viable approach to the interpretation of religion.¹⁵⁰ As described by Sharf, following Proudfoot, experience – and especially religious experience – is a concept that can be traced no further back than the late-nineteenth century work of the German theologian,

¹⁵⁰ F. Smith 2006a: 16.

Friedrich Schleiermacher.¹⁵¹ The validity of personal religious experience as such is seen to depend on highly specific cultural contexts, by extension of which its application in relation to Indian religious culture is envisaged as an issue of doctrinal concern that arose in the textuality of Asian religions as a form of response and resistance to the pressures of modernity. According to Sharf's summary:

The interest in religious experience among twentieth-century Asian intellectuals is not difficult to fathom. ...Castigated as primitive, idolatrous, and intellectually benighted, Asian religion was held responsible for the continent's social, political, and scientific failings. This is the context in which we must understand the Asian appropriation and manipulation of the rhetoric of experience. Men like Radhakrishnan and Suzuki would not only affirm the experiential foundation of their own religious traditions, but they would turn around and present those traditions as more intuitive, more mystical, more experiential, and thus "purer" than the discursive faiths of the West. ...This strategy had the felicitous result of thwarting the Enlightenment critique of religion on the one hand and the threat of Western cultural hegemony on the other.¹⁵²

Experience, from this perspective, is conceived of as a Western notion utilised by Indian intellectuals to the end of asserting a nation-wide cultural identity rooted in the image of tradition. More precisely, the configuration of experience as a touchstone in this particularly crafted narrative of contemporary Hinduism's esteemed and ancient pedigree appears to be only of twentieth-century vintage. Sharf deploys this as an illustration of a broader trend in religious hermeneutics, which he asserts is unfounded. He states:

I have suggested that it is ill-conceived to construe the object of the study of religion to be the inner experience of religious practitioners. Scholars of religion are not presented with experiences that stand in need of interpretation but rather with texts, narratives, performances, and so forth. While these representations may at times assume the rhetorical stance of phenomenological description, we are not obliged to accept them as such.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Sharf 1998: 98; Proudfoot 1985: xiii; cf. Habermas 1999: 135.

¹⁵² Sharf 1998: 102-103. See also his comments on p. 100: "In the end there is simply no evidence of an indigenous Indian counterpart to the rhetoric of experience prior to the colonial period."

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*: 111.

Although the accuracy of Sharf’s pin-pointing of an appropriation of the Western rhetoric of religious experience by modern Hindu intellectuals is beyond a doubt, neither he nor Halbfass, whose essay “The Concept of Experience” he largely follows, are concerned to outline its particular context-relative validity as a development that is associated specifically with the Brahma movement in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Bengal.¹⁵⁴ This is significant. Like Halbfass and Sharf, Brahma intellectuals constructed a model of experience based on the major commentaries and epistemological concerns of the classical śāstric tradition while eschewing discussion – and, in the case of the Brahmos, the living practices – of personal experience, such as emphasised by the yogis and tantrics who were marginalised and intellectually discredited under British rule.¹⁵⁵

A few historical details will suffice to indicate the anachronism involved here. As attested by the ethnographic surveys commissioned by Francis Buchanan, a British civil servant, in the early 1800s, there is a notable absence of evidence for the existence of the *sanātana dharma* or “old-time religion” prior to the nineteenth century, and it appears to have its base not in the Sanskritic tradition but in a Rāmaite form of Vaiṣṇavism that looks especially to Tulsidās’ *Rāmcaritmānas* as its core text.¹⁵⁶ According to reports compiled by the Bengali pundits commissioned by Buchanan in a village of Bihar considered to be a typical representative of religious distribution in the region, one-fourth of the population’s religious affiliation consisted of the worship of predominantly female village deities; these people and their practices were termed “unworthy of the note of any sage” and have been identified by David White as socially and culturally marginalized tantric practitioners.¹⁵⁷ Of the remaining three-quarters of the population considered “worthy of note,” one-sixteenth were noted as Kabīrpanthīs; three-sixteenths followed the “sect of Nānak”; one-eighth were identifiably Vaiṣṇava; another eighth, Śaiva; and a full one-fourth were Śākta,

¹⁵⁴ Halbfass 1988: 378-402. For a thorough overview of Neo-Vedāntic developments in the Brahma Samaj, its interactions with Western spiritualism and transcendentalism, and peculiar influence on the intellectual representation of India’s religious culture, see De Michelis 2004.

¹⁵⁵ Singleton 2010: 35-53.

¹⁵⁶ Lutgendorf 1991: 363.

¹⁵⁷ White 2003: 5.

devotees of the Goddess in the form of Śakti.¹⁵⁸ In addition to this, Buchanan records his own observation that a majority of pundits surveyed in the districts of Patna and Bihar were “Tantriks” who worshipped Śakti as their chosen divinity, while increasing numbers of Brahmans serving as Vaiṣṇava gurus were only recorded as he moved further northwest toward Ayodhya.¹⁵⁹ These statistics lead White to make the following pointed conclusion:

In other words, less than one hundred years prior to the “Rāma-fiction” of this part of the “Hindu heartland,” less than 10 percent of the total population, and one-eighth of the middle- and upper-middle-class religiosity reflected in Buchanan’s survey, considered itself to be Vaiṣṇava, while over 40 percent were either Tantric or Śākta.¹⁶⁰

The historical inaccuracy of both the recent scholarly denials of experience and the Brahmos’ earlier formulation of it as being meditation-based are brought into sharp relief when it is recalled that dependence upon the sensory dimensions of permeable embodiment is not only a defining characteristic of tantric and yogic practice, but closely if not inseparably related to what David Shulman has referred to as the “mental economy” behind a spectrum of South Asian traditions, a driving force of self-transformation that has in numerous cases been defined in explicit opposition to the variety of sense-denying transcendence popularised through Vedānta.¹⁶¹

Despite their basic differences, it is therefore still observable that where Vivekananda, Radhakrishnan, and other prominent Neo-Vedāntins constructed a vision of religious culture that depends upon a particular foregrounding of śāstric knowledge and privileging of transcendent meditative experience over the practices of the religious majority, Sharf and Halbfass have in some degree continued this project through their adherence to a particular constellation of *śāstras* as the authoritative texts of tradition and disinclination to consider the

¹⁵⁸ Pinch 1996: 82-92.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.: 37.

¹⁶⁰ White 2003: 5. To this may be added the following observation by Sanjukta Gupta and Richard Gombrich (1986: 123): “[The Vedic] stratum of ritual has never become wholly obsolete, but throughout Hinduism it has long been overlaid with the ritual of the monotheistic sects, ritual which is accurately known as *tāntrika*.” Sir John Woodroffe gives a similar statement; see Avalon 1960: 1.

¹⁶¹ Shulman 2012; White 2009: 38-48.

dearth of ethnographic, textual, art historical, and other evidence that attests to the centrality of embodied religious experience in South Asian culture.¹⁶² This is particularly the case in the work of Halbfass, who, taking his lead from these Neo-Vedāntin philosophers, focuses almost exclusively on Śāṅkara’s *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* as the final authority on the role of experience (*anubhava*, *brahmānubhava*) in the soteriology of the Veda. Halbfass does not consult either non-śāstric models for the interpretation of Vedic texts or question the extent of the applicability of the formal exegetical notion of *apauruṣeyatva* – the unauthored status of the Veda – outside of the bounded context of śāstric epistemology.¹⁶³ This reliance on Śāṅkara and the influences inherited from Pūrvamīmāṃsā allow him to form an assessment of the Veda as utterly and transcendently isolated from the subjectivity of its human recipients.

[Instead] of being a documentation of subjective experience, the Veda is an objective structure which guides, controls, and gives room to legitimate experience, as well as legitimate argumentation... It is an objective, transpersonal epiphany, an authorless, yet didactically well-organized body of soteriological instruction.¹⁶⁴

To quote Frederick Smith, this leaves us with the question of whether it is “actually the case that the elites whose discourse controls the “isms” also control the experience?”¹⁶⁵ According to the proliferation of texts and practices that attest

¹⁶² See discussion in Singleton 2010: 41-49 and De Michelis 2004: 178-80. The justification of this particular grouping of Sanskrit texts drawn upon by the Brahmos (especially those assigned to the philosophical tradition of Yoga by Vivekananda) is historically peculiar, but it intersects relationally with the intellectual preference for so-called “canonical texts” established by early Indologists. Cf. F. Smith 2006: 5-6.

¹⁶³ Gachter’s observation – that there might be individuals or groups who were authorities *within* the Vedic tradition, but no authorities who stood *over* the Vedic tradition – applies well here (1983: 80). Laurie Patton, for example, points out that “despite Mīmāṃsā’s influence in many areas of Vedic interpretation, the question of authorship has not been erased...despite Mīmāṃsā’s strategies, the rishis are nonetheless discussed in a number of Vedic texts” (1994: 282). For a discussion of the pragmatic aspects of *apauruṣeyatva*, I direct the reader to Clooney 1987: 673-74 and 1990: 168; see also Jamison 2007: 28.

¹⁶⁴ Halbfass 1988: 398. I note the critique of this approach offered by F. Smith, who states (2006: 17-18): “In spite of Sharf’s and Halbfass’s observations that personal inner experience is a notion imported to interpretations of Asian religious phenomena by Western and Western-informed scholars and practitioners, I contend that the removal of the role of individual inner experience, or subordinating it to a normative context, is another kind of ill-conceived construction of the object of study.”

¹⁶⁵ F. Smith 2006a: 43: “To say that brahmanism or Christianity inculcate control is to say that the human desire and capacity for exotic empowering experience is kept within manageable,

to the power of revelatory language as an agent and witness of personal transformation, it seems clear that the answer is they do not.¹⁶⁶ I would argue that while we are certainly not obliged to accept the phenomenological descriptions contained in Vedic texts, their rejection out of hand fails to constitute a secure methodological stance.

Language and Control

It is by now evident that Sanskrit is frequently interpreted as a tool of social control – a wide category of influences that observes the instilling of restrictions on behaviour, broadly understood, both within the narrow fold of the Brahmanical elite and across South Asian society at large, and extending from active or forceful inculcation to a more passive inheritance of cultural ideology. Surveyed from such a perspective, Sanskrit is an integral part of an historical trajectory of normativising influences, typically seen to flow from the top down, in which the erasure or devaluing of particularity, idiosyncrasy, and other expressions of personal (non-“Sanskritic”) identity establishes a common denominator linking language to control.

While the compelling nature of Sanskrit when seen in this light (as a discourse, as value-laden, as authoritative, as prescribed) may account for its pervasiveness in the textual culture of South Asia’s religious traditions, the equation between Sanskrit and the denial of individual expression is not able to explain the high personal stakes, the affective charge or emotional appeal, involved in its ongoing employment in self-transformative practices, past and present. Because this has a direct impact not only on the way that Vedic texts are defined, but also on the types of evidence they are thought to contain, and thus searched for, it is necessary at this point to ask whether this gap between Sanskrit’s authority and its affectivity is, in fact, a lacuna in our understanding of revelation – a scholarly oversight in need of redressal – or fully justified by the

recognizable limits. In fact, however, is it actually the case that the elites whose discourse controls the “isms” also control the experience?”

¹⁶⁶ Shrinivas Tilak (1994: 143) emphasizes the fact that the Mīmāṃsāka perspective on language “differs radically from the view of language favoured by the non-Mīmāṃsākas, who saw language as a tool for manipulating or transforming consciousness.”

view of the Veda as denaturalized and experience as ineffable or precognitive. Here again, Sharf provides an exemplary statement of the latter perspective:

I have suggested that it is a mistake to approach literary, artistic, or ritual representations as if they referred back to something other than themselves, to some numinous inner realm. The fact that religious experience is often circumscribed in terms of its nondiscursive or nonconceptual character does not mitigate the problem: that nothing can be said of a particular experience – that is, its ineffability – cannot in and of itself constitute a delimiting characteristic, much less a phenomenal property. Thus, while experience – construed as that which is “immediately present” – may indeed be both irrefutable and indubitable, we must remember that whatever epistemological certainty experience may offer is gained only at the expense of any possible discursive meaning or signification. To put it another way, all attempts to signify “inner experience” are destined to remain “well-meaning squirms that get us nowhere.”¹⁶⁷

Sharf does not deny the reality of experience to one undergoing it, but rather the plausibility of its observation and analysis through the signifying properties of language. He describes an impasse between linguistic representation and experience itself, locating a problem in the very rhetorical logic undergirding appeals to directly perceived phenomenal events; as he states: “The word “experience,” insofar as it refers to that which is given to us in the immediacy of perception, signifies that which by definition is nonobjective, that which resists all signification. In other words, the term experience cannot make ostensible a *something that exists in the world.*”¹⁶⁸ This widespread view of literary, artistic, and ritual forms as representations presupposes a divorce between reflection on experience and the immediacy of live experience, according to which the former is *a priori* framed as entirely theoretical and reduced to an abstract and disembodied, for cognitive, activity, while the latter is dismissed as irretrievable. It is important that this critique of language with its post-Hegelian separation of meaning and being is not conflated with the principle of ineffability, which has made its way into studies of the Upaniṣads in their identification by (primarily

¹⁶⁷ Sharf 1998: 113-114.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.: 113; italics original.

Western) scholars as mystical texts.¹⁶⁹ This, which is more precisely known in terms of the twinned issues of *aporia* and *apophasis*, poses a distinct logical paradox involving, on one hand, the doctrine that “nothing in principle can be said” about the nature of an absolute reality that transcends all form, and, on the other, the contradiction between the unitive character of mystical experience as a mode of awareness and the duality, if not multiplicity, assumed of both the process of knowing with its mental screens and the fundamentally differentiating operations of language.¹⁷⁰ As Kripal notes, a pronounced tendency of academic discussions of mysticism and language is to treat the mystical as a universal phenomenon that must, by very necessity of being what it is, be free of the trappings of cultural contextualization.¹⁷¹ In many cases, however, including that of Kripal’s maintenance of the “inherently dualistic categories of language,” the epistemological terms in which these discussions are couched are themselves culturally relative and therefore run contrary to the understandings of language and subjectivity, and the basic relationship between them, that are claimed by the texts.¹⁷² We return to these issues in Chapter 4; suffice to say here that such epistemological assumptions are unproductive to the extent that they obscure rather than clarify the connections between Sanskrit and embodiment that form the background to the *Āraṇyakas*.

One of the best-reasoned and also most methodologically sustained accounts of the positive relationship between existence, experience, language, and texts is perhaps that argued by the anthropologist Thomas Csordas in his study of linguistic expressions of religious healing. Csordas’ theoretical approach benefits from its development in light of and testing against a wide sample of linguistic situations including glossolalia, spontaneous outbursts, narrative accounts, and the use of scripted materials, as well as from its considerations of bilingual and speech-impaired subjects and the responses of spiritual communities to these varied expressions of religious experience. Stated succinctly, the result of

¹⁶⁹ Habermas 1999: 138; see also 139: “Hegel destroys the myth of the given through an analysis of the material implications of words and sentences. A language articulates in advance the conceptual space of possible encounters with anything in the world.”

¹⁷⁰ Matilal 2002: 66; Kripal 1995: 20-21. I direct the reader to Sell’s (1994) description of apophatic language.

¹⁷¹ Kripal 1995: 18.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*: 31.

Csordas' findings is the recognition that language occupies and occurs from within the same embodied space as is sensorily revealed in direct experience. Csordas thus describes his approach as being informed by "the notion of experience as a stance from which to understand the nature of human experience in culture":

It emerged from a moment in anthropology when "experience" was suspect on the grounds that it was either undefinable or inaccessible. Resisting this tendency, I have come to understand experience as the meaningfulness of meaning, immediate both in the sense of its concreteness, its subjunctive openness, its breakthrough to the sensory, emotional, intersubjective reality of the present moment; and in the sense in which it is the unmediated, unpremeditated, spontaneous or unrehearsed upwelling of raw existence. The anthropological challenge is, accordingly, not to *capture* experience, but to *give access* to experience as the meaningfulness of meaning.¹⁷³

Csordas' anthropological perspective – which in various respects recalls the arguments forwarded by Paul Tillich over half a century ago in support of the phenomenological study of the Bible¹⁷⁴ – has the potential to provide a thicker description of revelatory language than that offered in the accounts considered above because, in its re-grounding of meaning in the active state of existence that constitutes embodiment, it allows for a perception of simultaneity between self-transformative experience and text. Through the dynamics of experience, in other words, language becomes "comprehensible as such a self-process" and itself also something that is subject to being felt.¹⁷⁵ Following this, texts are able to genuinely disclose or reveal because they, via language, are co-extensive not only with the existential awareness of the speaker or knower, but also and equally with the ground of being itself, regardless of whether this is conceived of in terms of divine ultimacy or the scientific, final inescapability of the body.

¹⁷³ Csordas 2002: 2.

¹⁷⁴ Tillich 1955: 43: "It is...necessary to analyze from the subjective side of biblical religion and to confront it with the subjective side of the ontological task. This confrontation, however, will bring us to the point where the positive relation between biblical religion and ontology comes to light for the first time."

¹⁷⁵ Csordas 2002: 4. These observations are redolent of A. L. Becker's differentiation between language and the interior experience he coins "languaging" (2009: 9, 14, 349-350). Becker develops this model of languaging in reliance upon the concept of *ensimismamiento* ("inoneselfness") that is discussed by Ortega Y Gasset (1957).

To these observations must be added a further point: By ostensibly proceeding under the influences of the Western phenomenological tradition, especially as articulated in Merleau-Ponty's work on the encounter, or *entre-deux*, of self and world, Csordas' account of experience allows for the phenomenon of bodily "entextualization," to quote Flood,¹⁷⁶ that was mentioned in the previous chapter, a process which might be identified with that elsewhere known in the biological sciences as structural adaptation and which describes the inter-subjective transformations that occur in identity when personal subjectivity adapts to a trans-personal structure, such as a traditional text like the Veda. This accounts for both the objective side of revelation, the fixed point of focus or vanishing point of tradition, and its subjective dimension in the form of its recipients whose soteriological transformation forms a continuity of revelation over time. Furthermore, it preserves the specific cultural contours of the language in question; indeed, Elizarenkova's observation that the Vedic goddess Vāc "combines herself in both subject and object, being at once speech (Vedic text) and poet (creator of the text)" is noteworthy in this connection.¹⁷⁷ Thus it is precisely within the subjective character of an experiential upsurge of cultural knowledge that the meanings we seek are located. More to the point, it is in the transaction between language and person that texts become defined.

The modern recognition among cognitive scientists that the body is as much a product of culture as of biology, or that, in other words, it is the "existential ground of culture and self rather than just their biological substrate," opens the possibility for an understanding of the body's reality as "religious, linguistic, historical, cognitive, emotional, and artistic" in addition to biological

¹⁷⁶ Flood 2009: 87.

¹⁷⁷ Elizarenkova 1995: 20. Again, Tillich's theological observations are suggestive of the wider applicability of this view of revelation. He argues (1951: 109): "Revelation of that which is essentially and necessarily mysterious means the manifestation of something within the context of ordinary experience which transcends the ordinary context of experience. Something more is known of the mystery after it has become manifest in revelation. First, its reality has become a matter of experience. Second, our relation to it has become a matter of experience... If nothing happens objectively, nothing is revealed. If no-one receives what happens subjectively, the event fails to reveal anything. The objective occurrence and the subjective reception belong to the whole event of revelation. Revelation is not real without the receiving side, and it is not real without the giving side."

and anatomical.¹⁷⁸ This boosts an observation that has long been made of India's religious and philosophical cultures, namely, that being and knowing are indeed equivalent; as David Shulman observes: "Epistemology shades off into ontology, and vice versa: to know the truth is to become that truth, in a transformative and experiential manner."¹⁷⁹ What this means for our present purpose, the place of experience in the investigation of Sanskrit's cultural significance, and therefore in the definition of Vedic texts, is that language does not exist merely as a by-product of cognition, but is governed by physical embodiment and coloured by cultural perceptions of personhood, and has the ability to instantiate real changes in one's awareness, identity, and perception of their surrounding sensory environment. Soteriological advancement, such as that claimed in the *Āraṇyakas*, can therefore be a result of enjoined bodily constructions in which language is intentionally employed to act upon the malleable structures of personhood – and it can equally be attested to through language, which is generated from within the shifting parameters of mind-body awareness that results from lived experience in the world and thence may literally embody transformations in personhood.¹⁸⁰ When Sanskrit is seen not only as an object but as a state, a specialized knowledge grounded in ordinary biological processes, however these are specified by culture – assuming for a moment that this perspective will hold up to, and also be fleshed-out by, the information retrieved from the *Āraṇyakas* – we are immediately presented with the question of how that knowing, *vis à vis* the subject undergoing the experience, should inform a remodelling of our own accounting of genre.

¹⁷⁸ Csordas 1994, 2002: 3-4; see also Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 4-5; Maturana and Varela 1992: 211-212; Patel 2008: 3; and Varga 2005: 210. An intriguing study of the body as a reality relative to culture, and of the distinct conceptual structures and practices that emerge around these understandings, can be found in Kuriyama 1999.

¹⁷⁹ Shulman 1993: 99. Potter reaches a similar conclusion with respect to *karman* as a metaphor in the Sanskrit philosophical tradition; see 1988: 29-30.

¹⁸⁰ See Flood 2009: 78-92, 2004: 8-12; cf. F. Smith's account of *nyāsa*, which provides an exemplary instance of the intentional employment of language to institute psychophysiological changes in the practitioner (2006a: 376).

Āraṇyaka and *Anukṛti*: Reconsidering Genre

The value of the idea of an encounter between person and world that is also definitive of language has been attested through its productive employment in the retrieval of emic perspectives across a broad array of religious traditions and phenomena, and by its use as a keystone in comparison-based studies linking philosophy, science, and traditional worldviews.¹⁸¹ However, if this call to the living reality of perception is to be fully realized in academic research, it requires that our methodology not only acknowledges but engages with, and thereby maintains, the place of language as an expressive intersection between person and world. A pertinent methodological implication of these suggestions is therefore that the psychophysiological effects generated by the demands of sustained recitation, listening, memorization, and so on cannot be merely epiphenomenal to the traditional methods of transmitting the Veda, just as the high level of structural repetitions characterizing the composition of these texts can be seen to serve more than a solely mnemonic function. Technicalities momentarily aside, this presently means the recognition that the *Āraṇyakas* are not inert loci of referential meaning so much as instances of revelation in all respects – subjective, objective, semantic, and trans-semantic – that move forward from the space of personal realization, and therefore both carry the traces of their recipients' embodiment and function affectively in accordance with culturally inherited notions of personhood.

Nonetheless, to the extent that it has come to provide the view of the *Āraṇyakas* that modern Indology treats as representative of the indigenous tradition, Sāyaṇa's reading of the sense of *āraṇyaka* needs to be addressed. His equation of its appellation with an intended restriction surrounding its

¹⁸¹ To cite a range of examples: for asceticism in Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism, see Flood (2004); for Biblical religion, see Ong (1967, 1982) and Tillich (1951, 1955); for Confucianism, Ames (1984), Hall and Ames (1987, 1998), Tu Wei-ming (1972, 1973, 1994); in modern Japanese philosophy, Yuasa Yasuo (1987); in tantric Śaivite practice, Flood (2009); in yogic *āsana*, Morley (2001), and on perception and possession in Yoga, White (2009); in *kalarippayattu*, Zarrilli (1998). See also Abram (1996) on phenomenology, ecology, and shamanism; A. L. Becker (2000) on linguistics, philology, and identity-formation; J. Becker (2001) on biological analysis in ethnomusicology and emotion; Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1991) on cognitive science and Buddhist meditation; and Zarrilli (2004) on performance and in-depth engagement of bodily awareness.

performance and study occurs in verse 5 of his preface to AitĀ 1 and serves as a general introduction to the text:

*aitareyabrāhmaṇe 'sti kāṇḍam āraṇyakābhidham /
araṇya eva paṭhyam syād āraṇyakam itṛyatām //*¹⁸²

This is the section in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* known as [its] *Āraṇyaka*. It is maintained to be an *Āraṇyaka* [for] it should only be recited in the wilderness.

Further context for his interpretation is suggested by the comment made in verse 8, which, though addressed specifically to the content of AitĀ 1, indicates in the direction of a potentially significant point of divergence with mainstream approaches to the language of the text. Sāyaṇa states:

*sattraprakaraṇe 'nuktir araṇyādhyayanād iti //*¹⁸³

On account of its studying in the wilderness, it is said of the *sattra* [that its speech is] not to be uttered (*anukti*).

Given the difficulties presented by this passage, not least of which is absence of other recorded instances of *anukti* either in Sāyaṇa's commentary or elsewhere, our analysis of this term and therefore of this indigenous perspective of the language of AitĀ 1 must remain frustratingly incomplete. It is, however, possible, to draw some tentative observations. Firstly, the morphology of *anukti* does not carry the same suggestion of negative assessment as can be seen, for example, in the Vedic *durukta*, which is understood to refer to difficult (*dur-*, “bad, hard”) speech that is grammatically improper or otherwise fails to meet the ritually authoritative profile of Sanskrit demanded in orthodox ritual.¹⁸⁴ Short of other

¹⁸² Sanskrit text reproduced from Phaḍke 1898: 2. Phaḍke footnotes the editorial correction *pāṭhyam iti samīr[?]cāntaram* (ibid.). Keith (1909: 15) gives the variant readings *pāṭhyatvād* in place of *paṭhyam syād*, and *itṛyate* for *itṛyatām*; cf. Gonda 1975: 423 n.1.

¹⁸³ Phaḍke 1898: 3; he notes the variant readings *anuktakaraṇādhyayanād* and *–adhyayanāya hi* (ibid.). Cf. Keith 1909: 15.

¹⁸⁴ Hans Henrich Hock, “*aduruktavākyam* (PB 17.9): “Vrātya Prakrit” or Ritual Concerns” (presentation, 16th World Sanskrit Conference, Bangkok, Thailand, July 1, 2015). It is interesting to note a common denominator underlying both *anukti* and *durukta*, namely, their employment in respect to ritual practices associated with the little-known and even lesser-understood Vrātyas. To my knowledge, the possibility of an intentional connection here has not been explored; this is possibly on account of the strict lexical parameters that currently dominate the classificatory

instances of its employment coming to light, there does not appear to be reason to assume that *anukti* bears the sense of such a degradation or unsanctioned deviation in the quality of the speech utilised in the *sattra*. What it does plausibly indicate, by contrast, is a discernibly different mode of language use, the activity or engagement of a distinct quality within language, such as its power to affect its participants in particular and potentially dangerous ways. While this quality may elude modern linguistic description, it nonetheless accords with the depictions of language's motile force that are contained in the Ṛgvedic Āraṇyakas and upon which their various rituals and teachings arguably depend. The introduction to ŚāṅkhĀ 1.1 illustrates this conceptualization:

prajāpatir vai saṃvatsaras tasyaiṣa ātmā yan mahāvratam tasmād enat parasmai na śaṃsen net sarveṣāṃ bhūtānām ātmānaṃ parasmin dadhānīty atho indrasyaiṣa ātmā yan mahāvratam tasmād enat parasmai na śaṃsen ned indrasyaātmānaṃ prasmin dadhānīty atho yam evaitam ṛṇmayam yajurmayam sāmamayaṃ puruṣam saṃskurvanti tasyaiṣa ātmā yan mahāvratam tasmād enat parasmai na śaṃsen net sarveṣāṃ chandasām ātmānaṃ parasmin dadhānīti kāmam tu sattriṇām hotā śaṃset pitre vācāryāya vātmane haivāsya tac chastaṃ bhavati ātmānaiva tad yajñam samardhayati ।¹⁸⁵

Prajāpati is the year; the Mahāvrata is his body (*ātman*); therefore one should not recite it for another in case they place in the other the body of all beings. Now, the Mahāvrata is the body of Indra; therefore one should not recite it for another in case they place in the other the body of Indra. Now, the Mahāvrata is the body of this person (*puruṣa*) made of the *ṛc*, *yajur*, and *sāman* verses who they complete (*saṃskurvanti*); therefore one should not recite it for another in case they place in the other the body of all the metres. One may freely recite it, however, as the hotṛ of the Sattrins or for one's father or teacher – the recitation is really for oneself alone, and with oneself alone does one fulfil (*sam-√rdh-*) the sacrifice.

It may in the second instance be observed that the repeated reference to *araṇya* in verses 5 and 8 of Sāyaṇa's introduction allows the correspondence between *araṇya* and *āraṇyaka* to be further pursued. This is because *anukti* suggests a

schemata used in Vrātya studies and which restrict textual investigation to mid-Vedic sources, thus side-lining both the descriptions of ritual and language given in the Ṛgvedic Āraṇyakas (which do not employ the lexical items and other references that occupy scholarly attention) and Sāyaṇa's reference to *anukti* (which is chronologically removed).

¹⁸⁵ Sanskrit text reproduced from Pāṭhak 1922: 1. The implications of this passage are discussed at length in the examination of language presented in Chapter 4.

substantial connection between a quality of language and the placement of a spatial restriction around the recitation and performance of the Āraṇyaka. Unlike the explicit constraint *araṇya eva* (“only in the wilderness”), Sāyaṇa’s employment of *anukti* to describe the *sattra* does not automatically indicate that this quality applies exclusively to these liturgical proceedings, but is rather contextualised by the turning of his attention to the topic of AitĀ 1, in which case it serves to distinguish the transition from Brāhmaṇa to Āraṇyaka by elucidating the qualitative difference in their otherwise similar preoccupation with ritual.¹⁸⁶ When taken together as the major guidelines at play in Sāyaṇa’s description of the genre, this pair of considerations lead to the conclusion that the term *āraṇyaka* designates a text that can only be recited or studied in the wilderness because its language is such that it cannot be openly uttered – a definitive quality that identifies a common denominator underscoring the texts’ contents, but which otherwise leaves the grounds for inclusion open-ended. The precise variety of the Āraṇyakas’ contents, in other words, is undetermined and does not equate to a formal set. This, of course, is a tacitly polythetic description, an organizational approach to classification that in many respects goes against the reasoning employed in the majority of modern approaches to textual definition, which are largely monothetic in their outlook.¹⁸⁷ To *anukti* and the narrow constraint surrounding their performance might thus be added the further characteristics of the Āraṇyakas’ lineage-based relationship to the Saṃhitās, their Vedic chronology, their concern with how properly to establish – and, moreover, preserve – the moving parts that contribute to the arising of the *puruṣa*, and their attention to both the creative and destructive potential of language alike. These aspects of the Ṛgvedic Āraṇyakas’ emic worldview are examined over the

¹⁸⁶ See also Sāyaṇa’s comment in his preface to the AitB: *tata ūrdhvam atha mahāvratam ity ādikam ācāryā ācāryā ity antam āraṇyakavratarūpaṃ ca brāhmaṇam āvir abhūd iti* / Āgāṣe 1896: 5.

¹⁸⁷ Jonathan Silk has employed a polythetic approach, which he adapts from anthropology and the biological sciences, to great advantage in his discussion of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Silk describes the approach thus (2002: 387): “In a Polythetic Class, to be considered a member of the class each object must possess a large (but unspecified) number of features or characteristics which are considered relevant for membership in that class. And each set of features must be possessed by a large number of members of the class. But – and this is key – there is no set of features which must be possessed by *every* member of the class. There is no one feature or set of features necessary and sufficient for inclusion in the class. When a class has no single feature or set of features common to all its members, it is called Fully Polythetic.” Emphasis original.

following chapters. Suffice to say that an immediate benefit of this polythetic approach is its ability to account for the Āraṇyakas' eclecticism without destroying their inner coherence in the process.

A major issue that arises when *anukti* is permitted as a veridical or ontological reality is that of how it can be made available to study and analysis. And it is here that the perspectives provided by cognitive science and phenomenology allow the distance between traditional South Asian practices and modern theories of linguistic interpretation to be radically shortened. By virtue of the interconnections between language, revelation, and the ordinary grounding of human being-in-the-world, the Vedic texts with their patterns of recitation and ritual employment, and their interfacing with the transformative insights of the *ṛṣis* and ones “who know thus” (*ya evaṃ veda*), can be perceived as both a site and source of experience. Ostensibly, this is not specific to the Veda, but characteristic of traditional attitudes to revelation in terms of a pan-Indic cultural complex. Geoffrey Samuel, for example, makes the observation that:

Even if...understanding could be understood as a logical proposition outside from the inner transformation, and Indian traditions have been far from united over whether this is possible, it is ineffective without the transformation: the point is not to assert the logical proposition that one is Śiva, or that all is Buddha-nature, but to directly experience the truth to which those words refer. The liberating insight is thus not a logical proposition but something intrinsic to a patterning or attunement of the mind-body system as a whole to the wider universe of which it forms an indissoluble part.¹⁸⁸

If language is an instance of embodiment that surges forth from within the same space as the lived bodily experiences that ground meaningfulness, then linguistic meaning can be defined not simply in terms of rules, schema, symbols, tropes, customs, texts, and representation, but also and equally in terms of intuition, emotion, intersubjectivity, movement, evocation, and texture.¹⁸⁹ In the

¹⁸⁸ Samuel 2008: 351.

¹⁸⁹ Csordas 2002: 3-4. I note in particular his assertion that, “No matter how successful literary scholars might be in animating texts...textual(ist) interpretations remain reflections of experience, slightly to the side of immediacy. The missing ingredient is supplied by the notion of being-in-the-world, from phenomenological philosophy, insofar as it speaks of immediacy, indeterminacy, sensibility – all that has to do with the vividness and urgency of experience...if studies of

interpretation of Shulman and Stroumsa, traces of experience are embodied in the language of materials that address self-transformation and are available for retrieval through “careful hearing, for transformation, like everything else in life, has express texture, where the deeper meaning usually lies. We need to note the markers of each text – the shifters, syntactical patterns, the words and meters – that compose a self, and the persistent metaphors of self-transformation...”¹⁹⁰ In this view, the sensory and rhythmic qualities of language are understood to substantially illuminate not only a text’s proposed meaning and cultural significance, but also the personal expectations and experiences of bodily encounter that inform original composition, as well as ongoing employment.

Preliminary Conclusions

Although the argument can be made that such sonic and textural, non-semantic phenomena as those identified by Shulman and Stroumsa belong to a different domain than that of linguistic evidence, it is entirely possible for these considerations to influence – and, I suggest, advance – our modern practices of reading and translation.¹⁹¹ After all, a distinct vocabulary of orality features in the R̥gvedic Āraṇyakas that admits a nuanced soundscape into the way that processes of revelation are conceptualized and ritually enacted. It also illustrates the variety of forms in which orality occurs, including the recitation or repetition of invocations and hymns ($\sqrt{śams}$); opinions, sayings and teachings that proliferate within a body of common lore (*ity āha*, “it is said...”); revelations spoken by archetypal Vedic ṛṣis (*tad uktam ṛṣinā*, “this is said by a ṛṣi”), which are lexically distinguished from the announcement (*ud-ā-√hr̥*) of *brahmans* or revelatory statements by named speakers who are not ṛṣis; the identification of speech and breath alike as phenomena that sound out loud (*saṃ-√nad*); and, together with a

representation are carried out from the standpoint of textuality, then complementary studies of being-in-the-world can be carried out from the standpoint of embodiment” (ibid.).

¹⁹⁰ Shulman and Stroumsa 2002: 9.

¹⁹¹ See F. Smith’s notes on the technical considerations involved in translating, for example, a recitation accompanying the practice of *nyāsa* (2006a: 383): “It is important to read this in full, to translate this simple passage replete with redundancies...The performer, a ritualist familiar with the cadences of Sanskrit, is not just reciting a text and connecting the dots between mantra and body parts – [he] is training and prompting his body to resonate with the cadences of the text.”

distinction between the cosmological associations of reciting silently (*upāṃśu*) or aloud (*ucchaiḥ*), a differentiation between talking ($\sqrt{bhāṣ}$), reciting from heart (*adhīyāna-*) and uttering (\sqrt{jap}). To this may be added the frequent reference made to teachers as expounders (*vaktr*) and relaters (*pravaktr*) of the knowledge contained in the Āraṇyaka (versus the limited use of the titular *ācārya*), and the characterization of teaching as verbal pronouncement (*pra- $\sqrt{brū}$*). These conservative Brahmanical processes are elaborated by the accompanying depictions of the power of language to injure or protect by warding against harm or transferring it to one's enemy, depictions which have often been sidelined as a detritus of common superstition and irrational magic whose preservation in the canon of *śruti* is merely by account of their being caught, as if by accident, in the Āraṇyakas' undiscerning net. As will be seen in the following chapters, the proposed dividing line between soteriological and magical employments of Sanskrit is not always easily traced. The mutability – or mutuality – of this boundary points toward a worldview that is religious or cosmological in part by including all manner of things within its reach, where orality draws Sanskrit into the space of the world, enlivening it with a physically manifest presence against which the self either adapts and develops a kind of soteriological coordination, or fails to, as in the disintegrative impact of imprecations.

A close reading of the Āraṇyakas suggests therefore that the significance of orality extends beyond the technicalities and social infrastructures required to ensure ongoing transmission of the Veda and the rituals around which Vedic texts orbit. More importantly for the addressees of these texts, the activity of recitation generates the body of the speaker in ways that participate in and bring into focus the archetypal dynamics of the cosmos, such that the temporal narrative of human life is inevitably established as the immediate context of revelation and platform for spiritual attainment, which we examine in Chapter 3. For modern-day scholars of the Āraṇyakas, however, orality introduces a distinct set of issues that need to be addressed before further examination can take place, for they strongly affect our deliberations on text-internal notions of Sanskrit and embodiment, and this implicates the way these notions and processes are retrieved, particularly in the case of memorization. More than just a practical necessity of oral transmission

and its association with mnemonic structures, memorization is about the way a text is accessed – and, when considered in this light, the differences between being reliant upon reading a printed page and having a text by heart in its original language are not only stark but determinative of how information is gathered. Memorization entails, firstly, that the whole of a text is present in the memory of one who has learnt it. Because all of the parts that constitute its received form are simultaneously available to personal recollection, a memorized text is already a complete context prior to its being pushed through a framework of structured historical delineations: each textual unit is situated contemporaneously against all other such units, enhances and relativizes them, and prevents any from standing either first or alone.¹⁹²

The particularity of these contextual dynamics is something that neither chronological reconstruction nor our typical reading practices are suited to retrieve. The linear arrangement of textual strata, such as is encountered in a book, does not reflect the animated character of being able to bring to mind any part of a text, and do so in changeable or spontaneous orders. Such flexibility is well-known in Vedic traditions from the emphasis placed on the *ṛc*, as opposed to on the entire *sūkta*, as the primary textual unit used in ritual and also from the metonymic underpinnings of *vinīyoga*, the art of applying these units to novel contexts.¹⁹³ It is suggested again by the differing arrangements in the presentation of ritual material in the *AitĀ* and *ŚāṅkhĀ*: the cosmological explanations, references to *ṛcs*, and interpolation of mythemes and other grouped units of information featured in these texts show internal and external variability in spite of the fixed order of proceedings in the *Mahāvratā*.¹⁹⁴ These variations can move backwards and forwards across historically differentiated textual strata, as in the *ŚāṅkhĀ*'s interspersions of passages from Books 1 and 5 of the *AitĀ*; reorder the grouping and relationships of thematically similar materials; and differ in their degree of focus and detail and placement of emphasis. Again, although the presence of interlinear commentarial material has the effect of fixing textual sequences, it is equally clear that in the absence of such scaffolding these

¹⁹² Clooney 1996: 22-25.

¹⁹³ See Patton 2005.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. the accounts of the *Mahāvratā* in *AitĀ* 1 and 5 in comparison with *ŚāṅkhĀ* 1-2.

sequences display a tendency towards rearrangement across historical strata and narrative orders.¹⁹⁵ It is worth considering whether these variant readings may not be symptomatic of faults in transmission so much as indicative of a dynamic interaction with pools of memorized and hence simultaneously accessible materials, and reflective of the degree to which earlier texts fell under the controlling influence of the Brahmanical intellectual elite.¹⁹⁶

The oral transmission of texts situates them in the domains of speaking and hearing, and thus memorization, secondly, includes not only words but their sonic textures. Texts such as the *Āraṇyakas* were accessed through a developed capacity to physically recall and extract subtleties from lengthy tracts of spoken Sanskrit in which the cadence and rhythm of recitation not only heightens but may be inseparable from the way semantic meaning is received and understood. Total hermeneutic reliance upon reading alone and in silence comes at the risk of depleting a text of this richness because the cadences and patterns of sound that provide a layer of aural coherence simply go unheard. This silencing of language constrains the scope of textual analysis in its failure to engage with sonic features that play out in the space of memory as a non-semantic web of thematic prompts that exert influence upon how connections are made and brought to mind.¹⁹⁷ In

¹⁹⁵ A prime example of this is supplied by the formally recognized early Upaniṣads contained in the *AitĀ* and *ŚāṅkhĀ*. While Śāṅkara composed a separate commentary for the *AitU*, he did not give the *KṣU* individual treatment, although he does make reference to it several times in his commentary on the *Brahmasūtra*. This difference in circumstance is presumably to account for the numerous variant readings of the *KṣU*, making its transmission “much less faithful than that of any other ancient Upaniṣad” (Olivelle 1998: 324). This opinion is echoed in Cohen 2008: 139. The *AitĀ* inclusive of the *AitU*, on the other hand, has been the subject of a number of commentaries, and Keith observes (1909: 1): “Variant readings occur here and there, but none of sufficient importance to justify the idea that any different recensions of the text ever existed, and it is hardly ever possible to feel serious doubt as to the correct reading. What is especially important is that MSS. from both the extreme north – as Bühler’s MS. from Kashmir – and the south agree in presenting the same text. Further, the commentary of Sāyaṇa presents the same text as the commentaries of Śāṅkara on Books II and III [i.e., the *Bahvr̥ca*, *Aitareya* and *Samhitā Upaniṣads* of the *AitĀ*], and of Ānandatīrtha and Viśveśvara on the same books.”

¹⁹⁶ Cohen (2008: 139-140) suggests that Śāṅkara may not have composed a separate commentary on the *KṣU* by reason of its description of magical rites: “knowledge of magical rites was perhaps not the kind of knowledge that he cared to comment on.” This returns us to a point made earlier, namely, that it would be anachronistic to impose the epistemological requirements observed in formal argumentation upon texts such as the *Āraṇyakas*.

¹⁹⁷ This discussion is influenced by Clooney’s account of his research into the Śrī Vaiṣṇava poetic text, the *Tiruvāymolī*. He states (1996: 58): “By memorization the whole would become available all at once, operative in a kind of immediacy that includes, but passes beyond, every individual strategy for putting the text in manageable order in one way or another. The memorized text, present all at once, becomes the place where the thematic elements are able to play off against one

addition, the ignoring of sound can reshape the interpretation of structural features. This is particularly evident in the modern analysis of the high density of repetition that is a core stylistic trait of middle Vedic texts, where, rather than attending to the rhythmicity that arises from the interplay of similar and dissimilar Sanskrit sounds, attention is turned to what might be termed the fluency or literary sophistication with which information is delivered. Viewed in this light, repetitions are seen either pejoratively as merely “repetitive” (*viz.* uninspired) and thus redundant to the message of a text, or pragmatically as serving a mnemonic or pedagogic function.¹⁹⁸

An alternative is to see in the relationship between form and content the non-accidental communication of a particular worldview. In the case of the *Āraṇyakas*, as of other oral literatures, and especially of revelations of human being, form is necessarily extended to include the sounds of speech, which are not only non-arbitrary but dynamically brought to life and thus known through the intersecting processes of being received and recalled by a human subject. This is not to insist that these texts be memorized before they are studied, but rather to point out that if our reading practices are adapted to accommodate those aural qualities that dissolve into silence when texts are translated, this change in approach would offer the grounds for a promising rereading of old data by bringing it more fully to light.¹⁹⁹ To this end, I reproduce and translate Sanskrit passages in full, retaining all redundancies and repetitions; it is to the reader to sound them out and find – or hear – their rhythm and role in the organization and gradual disclosure of meaning.

When brought to bear on the primary sources investigated in the following chapters, these deliberations on orality inform an approach that seeks to retrieve

another in an endless series of possible combinations, according to patterns of similarity and difference that are bound only by the literary features of the text and then by the reaches of one’s imaginative powers.”

¹⁹⁸ Keith provides a classic instance of this type of interpretation in the Introduction to his translation of the *AitĀ* (1909: 54): “But utterly lacking as is the style in precision, balance, and elegance, and although the *Āraṇyaka* is destitute of any attempt at ornament, it has nevertheless a certain fitness to its subject-matter. The naïve speculations, the vague guessings after truth, the confusion of thought, which make up the matter, are not inadequately mirrored in the harsh abruptness and elliptic brevity of the style, and a certain variety is introduced in the frequent quotations of verses intended to bear out the argument.”

¹⁹⁹ A. L. Becker 2000: 10-12; cf. Beck 1993: 1-7.

the cultural importance of Sanskrit not in its structures and their socio-political appropriations, but through the internal affective life that reflects its cosmological activity and articulates a textual teleology from which the personal employment of Sanskrit in religious practice gains coherency. Chapter 3 turns to the depictions of the body in the primary sources, questioning the ways in which the body is constructed and controlled, mutates, and undergoes ritualization in the variety of instances that fall within the texts' cosmological breadth of view. These considerations take us from descriptions of ontological viability and the vulnerability arising from a transactional model of personhood to the multi-levelled impact of *samhitā* as denoting both revelation and the linkages involved in the perfection or completion (*sam-√dhā*, *sam-√rdh*, *sam-√kr*) of the self. The open-ended and subjectivizing affect of this shared vocabulary brings us to the matter of the embodied integration of Sanskrit and the individual, which bears reflexively upon textual hermeneutics and will be examined in Chapter 4. These deliberations in conjunction with the positions forwarded thus far – that the parameters ascribed to the study of Sanskrit can fruitfully be expanded, that our understanding deepens when existence claims are taken seriously, that embodied experience is a keystone to contextualizing revelation – here take on a practical weight as they shape the parameters of the linguistic investigation of *bandhus* and questions of translation and interpretation that occupy our final chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

Bodies of Revelation

*tad uktam ṛṣiṇā / svām yat tanūṃ tanvām airayatety asyāṃ
śārīryām imāṃ chandomayīm ity eva tad āha / atho tanūr eva
tanvo astu bheṣajam ity asyai śārīryā iyaṃ chandomayīty eva
tad āha /*

This was said by a ṛṣi: “Since it raised its own body in the body” – meaning this one made of meters in this, the mortal – “so let just this body be medicine for the body” – this body made of meters [is the medicine] of this, the mortal.

AITAREYA ĀRANYAKA 1.3.4²⁰⁰

Entering into the Texts

Precisely on account of the fact that we all have one, the body has become one of the most discussed and debated categories in postmodern scholarship. This interest in the body and its array of potential forms and interpretations are now regarded by many, as summarized Csordas,²⁰¹ to reflect the postmodern concern with fragmented meanings and the related attempt to locate a stable center that might provide a point of universal reference in historical and cross-cultural analysis. Put simply, a vast literature has been generated from the tension between the body as biologically common to all humans regardless of time or place and its particularity as a culturally constructed phenomenon, with these antipodal characterizations becoming increasingly vague as an outcome of developments in the apprehension of the body as undergoing continual, volitional or non-volitional, and even open-ended changes in chemical structure, anatomical

²⁰⁰ For other occurrences of the first part of this passage, see notes in Kubisch 2012: 25. The text quoted is RV 10.100.10c, and I follow the translations of this line by Jamison and Brereton 2014: 1559 (vol. 3).

²⁰¹ Csordas 1994: xi; cf. Doniger 1997: 167; Flood 1996: 20-23; Turner 1997.

appearance and so on, which may further intersect with cultural notions of self-transformation and other values and priorities.²⁰²

This literature and the dizzying array of considerations which comprise it are so large that even a minor foray therein would lead us far afield from the primary sources that form the bulk of the material to be examined in the present chapter. With this caveat in mind, however, there are two broad trends that bear identifying before our examination of body- and language-based practices in the R̥gvedic Āraṇyakas can commence. Both paradigms will be drawn upon and inform the questions with which the Sanskrit materials are approached; yet, remaining in accordance with the propositions outlined at the beginning of this study, they are employed in service of the Sanskrit, to extract and elucidate existence claims contained therein in ways that make sense and are valuable to a modern audience at the same time as maintaining what we understand of their traditional, emic, sensibility. As Clooney summarizes in his convincing arguments for *doing theology among* a community distant from our own, these efforts to understand will ultimately entail “reopening the old” such that a conversation is joined which takes place “across religious [or even just commonsensical] boundaries” and through which our questions will be re-asked and re-understood, perhaps many times over. In Clooney’s own words: “The goal is to participate in a wider conversation, to hear and see more, yet in a way that remains recognizable to one’s conversation partners, old and new, without merely doing something novel.”²⁰³

The first interpretative trend to be identified follows the genealogical or critical approach, most famously developed by Foucault, in which the body is perceived as a site of contested power and as subject to being defined or inscribed upon by socio-political discourses. To the extent that the body is here seen as an effect of deeper structural arrangements – be they symbolic, historical, or discursive – any basic ontological coherence it may possess is challenged, resulting in a standpoint that “dissolve[s] the body in the discourse.”²⁰⁴ Because the body here is inertly subject to being controlled, its power is limited to that

²⁰² See the discussion of the body in Turner 1997: 19-20 and Varga 2005.

²⁰³ Clooney 1996: 49-50.

²⁰⁴ Varga 2005: 224.

invested in it by discourse.²⁰⁵ Postmodern scholarship of the critical variety reinvests this power by calling upon the body in the destabilization of discourse, yet in so doing may simply replace one epistemological program for another: the body remains an abstraction and, as such, is not treated as being significantly involved in the generation of meaning. As was seen in the previous chapters, this trend is particularly apparent in scholarly and political critiques of how elite brahmanical codes of *dharma* and orthodox epistemologies have brought cosmological force to bear upon the marginalization of non-Brahmins, their languages, beliefs, and practices; its influence is also seen in interpretations of brahmanical ritual and recitative practices as no more meaningful than a mere following of the rules in isolation from any expression of personal subjectivity. The affinity or similarity between this interpretative approach to the human body and the approaches to Sanskrit examined earlier is not coincidental; in this application the restrictions surrounding Sanskrit and Vedic texts particularly are seen to be commensurate with notions of purity and pollution that circumscribe the body and attempt to control its vulnerability to chaos.²⁰⁶ As this approach questions whether Sanskrit texts can be authentically communicative of truly individual thinking, so it draws into doubt whether the heavily ritualized body articulated in the texts can authentically be anybody's.

A similar concern with the character of the interrelationship between language and the body, viz. subjectivity, is taken up by the second of these interpretative approaches, but in significantly, substantially different ways. As a result of building upon the phenomenological developments of Merleau-Ponty, but also by drawing variously from cognitive science, anthropology and biology, this second approach sees the body both in and as the context of the lived experience of everyday life. The foundational premises of this approach – resting on the concept of embodiment and its inevitability within the structures of all human processes and productions – were examined in the preceding chapter.²⁰⁷ In

²⁰⁵ Schilling 1993, especially p. 81; Núñez 1997.

²⁰⁶ Sanderson 1985 provides a sophisticated example of a critical approach to the interpretation of the body and the conceptualized role of text and language therein.

²⁰⁷ Maturana and Varela's (1992: 26-27) summary of this perspective in two key aphorisms is worth repeating here. Firstly: "all doing is knowing, and all knowing is doing." Secondly: "Everything said is said by someone."

this view, language and the body share inter-subjective space, where the subjectivity conceptualized relates to the first-person subject but is necessarily remote from Western notions of individuality²⁰⁸; and one emphatic upshot of this is that the proposition that all culture is grounded inescapably in the human body must be given serious consideration, not only because it is worth thinking about, but rather because the body is the final frontier of all we have to think *with*. As the ordinary moorings of the body – including awareness and mentation – are what make possible all experience, so all experience, no matter how extraordinary or revelatory, must take the shape of lived, embodied experience in the everyday life of the subject: the structures of human being, which structure perception and conception, entail that even the numinous can only be apprehended within biological parameters. Thus whatever is objective, abstract or independent – such as discourses, epistemes, and revelations – has “its full being in individual persons, in their minds and bodies, not in some abstract realm of Platonic ideas.”²⁰⁹ This does not deny the structures referred to by the critical or genealogical approach, but introduces an alternative understanding of subjectivity as co-requisite to their effectiveness: “the former is expressed in the latter, and the latter is articulated in the former. The text is expressed as body and the body articulated in the text.”²¹⁰ This approach is suited to an examination of the interior worldview of cosmological traditions, in which human being coincides with the workings of the cosmos and each fulfills the ideal direction of the other within the framework of soteriology.

This chapter first examines embodiment as it appears in certain archetypal forms in the Ṛgvedic Āraṇyakas and indicate a construction of the person – or, indeed, a relationship to the self or innermost support of identity – that is inseparable from notions of multiplicity and mutability and can be traced through

²⁰⁸ For example, see Flood 2006: 1987: “tradition-formed subjectivity must be distinguished from Western individuality...subjective transformations occur not through the assertion of individuality but through transforming self and body to master and tradition.”

²⁰⁹ A. L. Becker 2000: 14. See also Núñez 1997: 153: “...the living body is the source of experiences, and the history of our experiences defines what the body does and literally shapes how the body is. Ignoring the experience of the living body in the study of conscious experience is not a simple matter of harmless simplifying assumptions. It is throwing away the subject matter, and that is flatly a mistaken move.”

²¹⁰ Flood 2006: 4.

both narrative and vocabulary. This conceptualization of personal identity as a composite structure or multiform opens the doorway to the occurrence of transactions between entities of differing substance, which penetrate the boundary between natural corporeality and divine incorporeality to endow one with the qualities required for the attainment of immortality after death.²¹¹ Again, it is through the vocabulary employed by the texts that the subtleties of embodiment are most strikingly highlighted in both their specificity and conceptual sophistication. Furthermore, because these deliberations assume the dynamic fluctuations that occur within the living person as a prerequisite to the attainment of soteriological goals, they introduce the intersecting matters of temporality and its valorization of the person as a *knowing* structure, the medium in which soteriological alterations adhere. Thus, a related matter that must be addressed in the same context of fluctuations in embodiment is the possibility of an approach to knowledge (*prajñā, veda*) that sees it encoded within the body, as a phenomenon that exerts physical force in its entailment of internal reconfigurations.

We then turn to the strong and determinative influence of these cultural understandings on the framing of language and revelation, in particular as Sanskrit – *pace* knowledge – is brought into the body, with repercussions for the way that subjectivity is expressed as a textually-specified phenomenon, but as a phenomenon whose valence conforms differently before and after death. It is by no accident that these fluctuations between embodiment and disembodiment blur the lines that demarcate the personal, and properly soteriological, transformations endorsed by tradition from the apparently magical practices which lie outside the sphere of orthodox ritual. With respect to the multifaceted vision of personhood posited by the Āraṇyakas, vulnerability and control are related matters that go beyond such a boundary to the question of what these distinct technologies of transformation say about the relationship between Sanskrit and experiences of embodiment in light of a spiraling cosmos where language has the power to create and destroy, and revelation includes the disclosure of both.

²¹¹ Feher 1989: 13; Csordas 1994: 3.

Complex Identities and the Vocabulary of Creation

The AitĀ and ŚāṅkhĀ between them contain no fewer than thirty accounts dealing with the way that human being is constituted, the bulk of which are found in those sections of the texts formally recognized as Upaniṣads. Like many other such accounts held in the Upaniṣads, these passages often address their concerns in the narrative form of creation stories utilizing sequences of linkages and hierarchies that integrate the diversity of worldly phenomena and re-establish it in a relationship of irreducible identity with *brahman*, the all-encompassing primordial power that manifests and animates “this all” (*idaṃ sarvam*). While it is undeniable that these appeals to cosmogony and their repeated themes have often served as literary tropes, much of value in their detail is lost when they are viewed exclusively in light of an Upaniṣadic quest for knowledge and their meaning studied in separation from the style in which it is communicated.²¹² The importance of these passages for a contextualized examination of embodiment, in other words, lies not only in the vision of an essential self that they finally impress upon their audience, but equally in the processes involved in primordial creation through which the person is animated. As shall be seen, it is this complex of dynamic movements and their repercussions for personal identity, rather than the notion of an unwavering eternal *ātman*, that shape the heart of practices of self-transformation and relocate our discussion of Sanskrit from being imposed to being emplaced.

One of the most complete accounts of embodiment in the Ṛgvedic Āraṇyakas occurs in AitĀ 2.4.1-3 (= AitU 1.1), a creation story and exemplary instance of a typically Upaniṣadic narrative structure that displays the following basic stages: (1) before either being or not-being there was nothing other than *brahman*, an absolute and unlimited power or principle²¹³; (2) *brahman* decides to create (worlds, gods, creatures, etc.), and does so by pouring its desired subject

²¹² Cf. Brereton’s (1990: 120) comments on this narrative.

²¹³ Not to be mistaken for the *brahman* of Vedānta, *brahman* as it appears in the Āraṇyakas and Upaniṣads is a broad term or designation for an absolute, eternal and unlimited power or principle whose specific conceptualization and associations are variable.

forth from itself, which; (3) by various means and phases that may include heating, division or emergence, copulation and chain-reactions, the teeming multiplicity of this world arises; and (4) this multiplicity is shown to be integrated within, permeated by or established upon the singular and fundamental comprehensiveness of *brahman*, to the effect that there are no loose ends or real distinctions but only the one true identity. It is the fourth of these stages, in which through processes of erasure, reversal and deference a vision of integrative totality emerges, considered in conjunction with a turn away from deliberations on ritual objects to the subtle internal connections between the macrocosm and human body, that is taken as a defining characteristic of the early or classical Upaniṣads. For instance, as Brereton states with reference to the passage from the AitĀ to which we shall shortly turn:

The correspondence between the microcosm and the macrocosm illustrates how the Upanishads fashion a vision of totality through correlation. This correspondence unifies the world in the form of the person, and therefore makes the world comprehensible as a whole. Furthermore, it also implies that the world and the power that controls it are not outside, bearing down and threatening the individual. Rather, because the parts of the world are equivalent to the parts of a person, humans include everything within themselves.²¹⁴

As alluded above, a note of caution is in order here: while the numerous correspondences between the parts and faculties of the body and various macrocosmic forms and elements undeniably serve the communication of an integrative vision – and, indeed, also bolster the understanding of an evolution in soteriological practice emphasizing the direct realization of these esoteric connections (*upaniṣad*) – these connections, and the accounts of their entry and departure from the body, have much to say about a conception of personhood which is obscured by a singular focus on the transformative discovery of *brahman* through the human subject's *ātman*. In other words, interpretative priority given to the indivisibility of one's innermost identity may well remain in keeping with the final message of these narratives, but it falls short of accounting for the lived reality – better, the soteriological context – of a body whose

²¹⁴ Brereton 1990: 122-23.

interiorization of primordial macrocosmic elements pends entirely upon its penetration by those elements, firstly, and secondly upon their remaining in place. Again, the identity or co-extension of a person's *ātman* and the universal *brahman* is stable, yet with respect to each embodied person, the stability of this identity does not speak for the further layers of identification that are contributed by the presence of deities (*devatā*) in the body, nor for the temporality of their involvement with the person within whom they share a locus until either their inevitable departure at death or their volitional departure under other circumstances. In anticipation of a conclusion to be discussed later in this chapter, it may be postulated that this openness of the body, its vulnerability to chaos or disordered confusion, informs a further practical impetus in the mode of maintaining the *cosmos* of the body as per a control center; and that this bears strongly upon a forceful identity of Sanskrit that is inseparable from the permeability of personal embodiment.

We return now to AitĀ 2.4.1-3.²¹⁵ This narrative introduces a number of archetypal concerns and paradigms, quite systematically, and its deliberations on origins and underlying patterns are worth examining at length. In this beginning, “this [world] was a self, one alone, and there was nothing else at all that blinked an eye” (*ātmā vā idam eka evāgra āsīn nānyat kiñcana miṣat*). The self resolves to pour forth the worlds (*sa īkṣata / lokān nu sṛjā iti //*), releasing a group of four impressionistic spheres evoking expansiveness and movement: the flood, the glittering specks, the mortal, and the waters (*ambho marīcīr maram āpaḥ*). At this point, the narrator's voice re-enters to explain that what appears abstract is in fact a complex map of the cosmos comprising three vertically oriented worlds of which the highest and lowest share a symmetrical relationship to unlimited bodies of water: “Now the flood is beyond the sky, and its foundation is the sky (or heaven); the glittering specks are the space in-between; the mortal is the earth; and what is beneath are the waters” (*ado 'mbhaḥ pareṇa divaṃ dyauḥ pratiṣṭhāntarikṣaṃ marīcayaḥ pṛthivī maro yā adhastāt tā āpaḥ*). The self next resolves to pour forth keepers of the worlds (*lokapāla*), and, through a process of

²¹⁵ All translations in this chapter are my own; however, they are influenced by Olivelle's (1998) translations of the early Upaniṣads.

heating, catalyzes a series of chain-reactions that systematically weave onto the scaffold of worlds just emitted to create a grid of distinct vertical hierarchies along with their horizontal counterparts:

*so 'dbhya eva puruṣaṃ samuddhṛtyāmūrccayat / tam abhyatapat
tasyābhitaptasya mukhaṃ nirabhidyata yathāṇḍaṃ mukhād vāg vaco 'gniḥ
/ nāsike nirabhidyetāṃ nāsikābhyāṃ prāṇaḥ prāṇād vāyu / akṣiṇī
nirabhidyetāṃ akṣibhyāṃ cakṣuś cakṣuṣa ādityaḥ / karṇau nirabhidyetāṃ
karṇābhyāṃ śrotraṃ śrotrād diśaḥ / tvaṇi nirabhidyata tvacā lomāni
lomabhya oṣadhivanaspatayaḥ / hṛdayaṃ nirabhidyata hṛdayān mano
manasaś candramāḥ / nābhir nirabhidyata nābhyā apāno 'pānān mṛtyuḥ /
śiśnaṃ nirabhidyata śiśnād reto retasa āpaḥ //*

From the waters alone [the self] drew out man and gave him a solid shape. It incubated that man, and from that man so incubated a mouth was hatched like an egg; from the mouth hatched speech; from speech, fire. A pair of nostrils was hatched; from the nostrils hatched out-breath; from out-breath, the wind. A pair of eyes was hatched; from the eyes hatched sight; from sight, the sun. A pair of ears was hatched; from the ears hatched hearing; from hearing, the directions. A skin was hatched; from the skin hatched hair; from hair, plants and trees. A heart was hatched; from the heart hatched the mind; from the mind, the moon. A navel was hatched; from the navel hatched in-breath; from in-breath, death. A penis was hatched; from the penis hatched semen; from semen, the waters.

To summarize, what has been created in this second layer of “pouring forth” comprises: the solid and inert form of man, drawn from the waters beneath up to the level of earth or the mortal; the orifices/openings, definitive external features (hair and skin, as compared with fur, etc.) and major centers (heart, navel) of the Vedic body, also inanimate and obtaining at the level of the mortal; a host of deities (*devatā*) that belong to the upper sphere of heaven/sky (*div*), and which, as will shortly be seen, are animate and willful; and various elemental, spatial, cosmological and temporal features of the macrocosm that abide in the space between (*antarikṣa*) earth and heaven. Nowhere does the Ait̄ indicate that these manifestations are to be understood as illusory or that the relationship between them is simply one of equivalence or similarity. Each, once emitted, sits aside from the original *ātman* in a state of disembodiment – albeit within its own particular kinship-group – but retains the status of an emanation or hypostasis.

The body is an exception, for it is characterized by a vacancy made possible by its plural affiliations and corresponding lack of self-containment.

Unlike the person or *puruṣa*, then, these deities and cosmological forms each possess a unique and primordial identity, but it is an identity that is incomplete, limited to their status as specific parts within the whole. Nor, it appears, is there space for the deities to re-group either vertically or horizontally – within or across hierarchical streams – and so together constitute a communal identity that would reflect the fullness and limitlessness of the original *ātman*²¹⁶: the deities, as also the cosmological forms, are like reference-points on the grid of worlds; having hatched or broken away from the person, they are implicitly isolated by the absence of a suitable dwelling (*āyatana*) and foundation (*pratiṣṭhā*) on which to realize their ontological viability, or be sustained. This differentiation is not stated explicitly, but is inferred on the basis of similar patterns in this and other narratives in the Ṛgvedic *Āraṇyakas*; it also resonates with the Brāhmaṇas’ preoccupation with the lifeless condition of *pr̥thak*.²¹⁷ If accurate, this interpretation would be in keeping with the myths of Prajāpati that occur elsewhere in these texts, none among which address *jāmi*, a symmetrical but polar flaw in creation.

This lack of cohesiveness informs the first of three complications that arise in this account, around which each subsequent paragraph is structured. The second paragraph in the narrative, AitĀ 2.4.2, thus continues: “these deities that had been poured forth fell down into this magnificent foaming sea; [and] it (the sea) afflicted that [self] with hunger and thirst” (*tā etā devatāḥ sṛṣṭā asmin mahaty arṇave prāpatams tam aśanāpipāsābhyām anvavārjat*). In response, the deities demand that the self find them an abode, a physical dwelling, in which they can “get established and eat food” (*āyatanaṃ naḥ prajānīhi yasmin pratiṣṭhitā annam adāmeti*). The self brings them a cow, and then a horse; but they reject first one and then the other, calling them inadequate (*alam*). Finally, the self brings them a man – the highest of *paśu*, creatures fit to be sacrificed – at

²¹⁶ The animation of the deities is implicit in the centrality of movement to their physiological functions, while the cosmological and other macrocosmic phenomena seem in some sense to depend on the deities in order to exist.

²¹⁷ See Verpooten 1977.

which the deities announce that man indeed is well-made (*tā abruvan sukṛtaṃ vateti*).

The order of emergence is now exactly reversed, but what this reversal achieves is more than just a mirroring and correspondence between the parts of the world and the human body.²¹⁸ This is indicated by the introduction of the verb *pra-√viś* (to enter into, take possession of), which by the time of the Upaniṣads, as F. Smith observes, “is used for entry in which the intentionality of entering, pervading, permeating, or possessing originates from without, from an external agent.”²¹⁹ In this respect, again citing Smith, *pra-√viś* replaces the employment of *ā-√viś* in the *Ṛgveda*, where it is used

not in the simple sense of entry, as a person through a door, but in the more abstract sense, beyond the normal physical contexts of entering a separate enclosed or semienclosed space. The root *ā-√viś* in its many derivative forms occurs almost entirely in the sense of entities of different densities or substantialities penetrating and pervading one another.²²⁰

Such an employment of *pra-√viś* in the sense of an external entity entering and taking up possession of another entity, as opposed to indicating a basic return or re-entry, is apparent in AitĀ 2.4.2.²²¹ This is because, firstly, the deities are external, disembodied, and of an altogether different substantiality to man, who they eventually perform their actions *through* the medium of; and secondly, the possession is guided externally, in this case under the instruction of the *ātman*, but later through the volition of the deities themselves. Thus:

²¹⁸ Compare the examinations of AitĀ 2.4.1-4 by Brereton (1990: 120-122) and F. Smith (2006a: 206).

²¹⁹ F. Smith 2006a: 211.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*: 13-15, 110-172 (esp. 117).

²²¹ As previously mentioned, recent scholarship indicates that these narratives need to be read not just as rarified products of orthodox religiosity, but as part of the broader world of “folk” practices, including possession (*āveśa*) and Tantra, in which light the Brahmanical “inculcation of control” spoken of by Gombrich takes on far more nuanced aspects (Gombrich 1998, discussed in Chapter 1 above; cf. Sanderson 1985.) As for a convergence of the folk and the classical, F. Smith levels the convincing argument that: “What transformed folk into classical was not appropriation of folk material by a brahman literati, but the dynamics of preservation between the cognitive and narrative aspects of literary production” (2006a: 175). This might be compared, for example, with the “reconstruction” of Buddhism at the hands of scholars; see Almond 1998, Hallisey 1995, Lopez 1995.

tā abravīd yathāyatanam praviśateti / agnir vāg bhūtvā mukham praviśad vāyuh prāṇo bhūtvā nāsike praviśad ādityaś cakṣur bhūtvākṣiṇī praviśad diśaḥ śrotram bhūtvā karṇau praviśann oṣadhivanaspatayo lomāni bhūtvā tvacam praviśāms candramā mano bhūtvā hṛdayam praviśan mṛtyur apāno bhūtvā nābhiṃ praviśad āpo reto bhūtvā śiśnam praviśan / tam aśanāpipāse abrūtām āvābhyām abhiprajānīhīti te abravīd etāsv eva vām devatāsv ābhajāmy etāsu bhāginyau karomīti / tasmād yasyai kasyai ca devatāyai havir gr̥hyate bhāginyāv evāsyām aśanāpipāse bhavataḥ // AitĀ 2.4.2

[The self] told them: “Each *enter* according to your respective abode.” Fire became speech and entered the mouth; wind became out-breath and entered the nostrils; the sun became sight and entered the eyes; the directions became hearing and entered the ears; the plants and trees became hair and entered the skin; the moon became the mind and entered the heart; death became in-breath and entered the navel; and the waters became semen and entered the penis. Hunger and thirst then said to him [the self]: “Find one for us.” It said to them: “I give you a share among these very deities, I make you sharers among them.” Therefore, to whatever deity an offering is made, hunger and thirst are sharers alongside that deity.

According to Brian Smith’s examination of this and similar passages in the Brāhmaṇas, the unintended arrival of hunger and thirst – together with the theme of food that tries to run away – should be interpreted as indicating a mid-Vedic conceptualization of creation as disordered and unsatisfactory.²²² This reading supports his suspicion of such sequences as providing justification for the positioning of Brahmins at the apex of the human hierarchy as those whose rituals bring order to the world, and hence as those upon whom all others must properly depend. What he does not address is that these events fit with the complication/resolution structure of the narrative, wherein each successive complication is not only solved by the primordial *ātman* but provides further insight into the nature of the afflictions faced by humans together with a paradigm for their understanding, and perhaps even for their control, that again draws upon the deities’ activity within the body. Thus, having made hunger and thirst as compelling as the deities, and having done so in a manner that implicitly acknowledges them as another set of embodied phenomena that exerts uninvited force within the body, the self now decides to create food for the worlds and their

²²² B. Smith 1998: 60.

keepers. Food, another solid form (*mūrti*) is born out of the waters that the self has incubated, but it seeks to run away as soon as it is born (*tad enat sṛṣṭam parāṇ atyajigāṃsat*, AitĀ 2.4.3). The self tries, and fails, to capture the food with each of the deities in turn, until at last “it tried to take it over with the in-breath, and then managed to seize it. So the wind (*vāyu*) is the one that captures food, wind is the procurer (*āyu*) of food” (*tad apānenājighṛkṣat tad āvayat / saiṣo ’nnasya graho yad vāyur annāyur vā eṣa yad vāyuh*).²²³

The same paragraph continues with an account of how the self entered the body:

sa īkṣata katham nv idam madrte syād iti / sa īkṣata katareṇa prapadyā iti / sa īkṣata yadi vācābhivyāhṛtam yadi prāṇenābhiprāṇitam yadi cakṣuṣā dṛṣṭam yadi śrotreṇa śrutam yadi tvacā sprṣṭam yadi manasā dhyātam yady apānenābhyapāṇitam yadi śīsnena viṣṣṭam atha ko ’ham iti / sa etam eva sīmānam vidāryaitayā dvārā prāpadyata / saiṣa vidṛtir nāma dvās tad etan nāndanam / tasya traya āvasathās trayaḥ svapnā ayam āvasatho ’yam āvasatho ’yam āvasatha iti / sa jāto bhūtāny abhivyaikṣat kim ihānyam vāvadiṣad iti / sa etam eva puruṣam brahma tatamam apaśyat / idam adarśam itīm³ / AitĀ 2.4.3

It thought to itself: “How can this possibly exist without me?” And it thought: “Through which one of these should I enter?” It thought: “If it is uttered by speech, if it is exhaled by the out-breath, if it is seen by sight, if it is heard by hearing, if it is felt by the skin, if it is thought by the mind, if it is inhaled by the in-breath, if it is ejaculated by the penis – then who am I?” Splitting open just this parting in the hair, it entered by this door. This door is named ‘Split’ – it is a garden of pleasure. It has three dwellings, three levels of dream: this is a dwelling; this is a dwelling; and this is a dwelling. When it had been born (*jāta*), it surveyed the beings, reflecting: “Will it be declared there is another here?” It saw only this person, *brahman*, the utmost. “I have seen this (*idam*),” it said.

The information contained in these paragraphs allows some significant additions to be made to the Āraṇyakas’ depiction of archetypal embodiment. This goes beyond either a singular summary identification of *brahman* and *ātman* or a merely postulated literary or metaphorical equation between body and world, neither of which sufficiently accounts for the multiple dynamics at play in the narrative. This is because what emerges from a literal reading of the Sanskrit is a

²²³ The text does not explain the new association of *apāna*, in-breath, with *vāyu*.

picture of composite personhood, in which the person is a compound of diverse elements with different substantialities held within the encompassing structure of the body. It is also composite because, as an identity, it rests upon the interrelationship of multiple relationships.²²⁴

These observations implicate certain breaks with some of the most influential divisions of scholarship in the study of the self and embodiment. First, the perspectives articulated in AitĀ 2.4.1-3 amount to a claim for the existence of external and disembodied substances that penetrate into the body and thereby constitute its physiological functioning, whilst at the same time contributing their own macrocosmic “substance codes” – as termed by Marriott²²⁵ – to the person’s ontology and, finally, to the realization and definition of identity. The unique configuration of these deities and their codes within a previously lifeless body differs radically from a primary view held by cognitive science in both its neurophysiological (or biological) and philosophical streams, which in one of its versions states “our explanatory proposal of conscious experience must be coherent with the knowledge we have about physics. Following this assumption we leave no room for spirits, ghosts, or other disembodied ‘beings.’”²²⁶ Here, embodiment is necessarily of an internally-originating biological milieu whose identity is specifically human, as opposed to of a complex of external and disembodied substances which each contribute a distillation of their own identity to the creation of a composite person. Another articulation of this premise, argued by Lakoff and Johnson, posits that “we all have a metaphor system that conceptualizes our minds as disembodied,” and that this informs the development of a metaphorical “Subject” that in turn has become articulated in worldwide religious terms as a “Soul or Spirit.” This is incommensurate with a biologically-grounded conception of embodiment. In the words of Lakoff and Johnson: “Whether you call it mind or Soul, anything that both thinks and is free-floating is a myth. It cannot exist”:

²²⁴ This might be compared with early Chinese deliberations on the body in the cosmos; see Lewis 2006.

²²⁵ Marriott 1976.

²²⁶ Núñez 1997: 153.

Requiring the mind and Soul to be embodied is no small matter. It contradicts those parts of religious traditions around the world based on reincarnation and the transmigration of souls, as well as those in which it is believed that the Soul can leave the body in sleep or trance. It is not consistent with those traditions that teach that one can achieve, and should aspire to achieve, a state of pure consciousness separate from the body.²²⁷

This widespread conceptualization of embodiment, which bears strongly on previously discussed notions of the person as a bounded individual, automatically falsifies the model of entry and possession suggested by *pra-√vis* and turns instead to a paradigm of spirituality based on ethically-oriented environmentalism arising from contact and conviviality with a world that is finally experienced as “more-than-human.” The understanding of what makes for truly human identity, in other words, is framed by the dynamics of an environment, both plant and animal, whose animation is entirely dependent upon the sensing body and is relative to a person’s degree of sensitivity. Because this etic perspective maintains the inescapability of our biological functioning, and thence is able to account for culturally distinct experiences of the body by invoking tradition as another environment to which these functions adapt or undergo ontogenic co-ordination, it has taken on a level of universalism in cross-cultural examination.²²⁸

Although the more or less consistent denial of external self-volitional phenomena seems to suggest otherwise, these accounts illuminate an interrelationship between bodily structures and the derivation of meaning from the world, and in so doing have the potential to deepen our understanding of passages like Ait̄ 2.4.1-3 by drawing attention to unarticulated points of reference embedded in texts. It is easy, for example, to see how precognitive experience of the automated internal functions and adjustments of the body inspires conscious reflection on the disembodied origin, motility and independent volition of the deities, and likewise to see how these are experienced as a functional relationship between the internal milieu and the cosmos; in addition, this highlights the non-random nature of the deities’ appearance as protagonists and indicates a level of textual coherence beyond rhetoric or narrative device that

²²⁷ Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 563-565.

²²⁸ For an example this interpretation in cross-cultural context, see Abram 1996.

becomes evident once the interconnection between the body and cultural production is brought into consideration. Furthermore, these perspectives irrevocably implicate a physical experience of language in bodily adaptations and developments in personal awareness, which opens new dimensions in textual interpretation. Yet it is only through the admission of the deities' viability as external substances that the Vedic or Upaniṣadic model of personhood comes into focus as a unique variety of fluctuating embodiment in which disembodiment is a prerequisite that binds human ontology to practices of self-transformation and enables Sanskrit, as *vāc*, included among the deities, to become literally established in the person, exert independent influence over them, and either invest or divest them of aspects of identity.²²⁹

Another point of divergence occurs with respect to scholarly approaches to the matter of personhood or identity in the Upaniṣads. These approaches, in brief, draw upon a broadly Indic conceptual binary between person and self, or *puruṣa* and *ātman*, in which the person is delineated as a material collocation of substances, forms and attributes that is worldly and subject to cultural construction, undergoes change, can be possessed by external forces, and – in the case of sufficient epistemological or substantial alterations – may reflect the presence of the *ātman* or manifest extraordinary abilities (*vibhūti*; e.g. AitĀ 2.1.7). This is properly distinguished from the *ātman*, which is an eternal and pre-objective “metaphysical residue” produced within the *puruṣa* and ascribed freedom, autonomy and reflexivity.²³⁰ As has already been seen, such binaries tend to become aligned with other such constructions; with respect to the phenomenological distinction between person and self, two further comparisons are often appended: the traditional Indian preoccupation with the immortal principle in the person as opposed to an only passing interest in the human (typically “man,” *manuṣya*) as a species (*homo sapiens*), and the categorical difference from *ātman* implicated by the prevailing descriptions of the body as

²²⁹ To anyone familiar with the prevailing claims of Pūrvamīmāṃsā regarding Vedic interpretation these statements may seem oppositional. It may however be said that the episteme of *apauruṣeyatva* is illustrative of a belief in language's independent capacity to pervade and direct human cognition and behavior, and thus at the same time implicates the lived body and its processes as co-requisite to the realization of soteriological goals.

²³⁰ F. Smith 2006a: 19-20; Fields 2001.

either *śarīra*, that which breaks down or decays, or as *deha*, the body as a container of the immaterial self.²³¹

These polarities in identification are central to the cosmology examined in this chapter and form a necessary backdrop to the relationship between language and person – they are, in other words, a crucial inclusion in the armamentarium with which the primary sources are interpreted. The distinction between *ātman* and *puruṣa*, already evident in the narrative sequence of AitĀ 2.4.1-3, is reinforced by the language of the passage, where the primordial *ātman*'s entrance into the body is cause for two significant additions to the preceding Sanskrit vocabulary. The first of these is the description of the person's *ātman* as having been born or produced (*jāta*) rather than emitted (\sqrt{srj}), which suggests the possibility that whereas emission involves a disembodiment or separation from the matrix of *brahman* that results in elements or substances that are bounded, production insinuates an embodied reproduction that retains the identification with *brahman*. This implication of the verb \sqrt{j} is not opposed to its common employment in the sense of birth, and includes the reduplication of the deities that possess the body. Whether reproduction is of the mortal or the immortal, what is produced remains fully identified with its parental species or primordial archetype. AitĀ 1.3.8, a relatively older passage, provides a supporting statement that connects these senses of \sqrt{j} to indicate that birth is a complete reproduction of embodied identity.

*cakṣuḥ śrotraṃ mano vāk prāṇaḥ tā etāḥ pañca devatā imaṃ viṣṭāḥ
puruṣaṃ pañco haivaitā devatā ayaṃ viṣṭaḥ puruṣaḥ / so 'trālomabhya
ānakhebhyaḥ sarvaḥ sāṅga āpyate tasmāt sarvāṇi bhūtāny āpipīlikābhya
āptāny eva jāyante / AitĀ 1.3.8*

These five deities – sight, hearing, mind, speech and *prāṇa* – have entered (*viṣṭa*) this person; this person has entered (*viṣṭa*) even these five deities. He is here obtained completely throughout his limbs from the hairs of his head to the tips of his nails; therefore all beings down to ants are born (*jāyante*) so obtained.²³²

²³¹ See Halbfass 1991: 266-289; Fields 2001: 21-23.

²³² Keith (1909: 186) translates *āpyate* as “pervaded”, whereas Sāyaṇa's comments on this passage indicate that this verb should be read in the sense of “obtained” (*āpyate prāpto dṛśyate*, Phadke 1898: 54). The latter seems better in keeping with the semantic overlap of \sqrt{vis} and *pra-√vis* in later literature, with respect to which it would carry the sense of the deities' entrance and

The contrast between the expansive completeness of *ātman* and the bounded identity of the deities in the body of the person remains consistent in the second lexical addition, which is the use of *pra-√pad* to describe this final episode of entry into the body. Unlike *pra-√viś*, which was used of the deities' entry into and possession of the *puruṣa*, the prefixed verb *pra-√pad* carries nuances of permeation and penetration in addition to its simple senses of going forward or entering.²³³ Assuming that F. Smith is accurate in his observation that *pra-√pad* would thus remain closer to early uses of *ā-√viś* in the *Ṛgveda*, it is also distinguished from *pra-√viś* by its suggestion of benign permeation as opposed to the ambivalence of entry and possession that is guided externally and can occur without the consent or willingness of the human subject. Further, if the place of its occurrence in the progression of the narrative is given value, then a comparison in the extent of these entrances can be made: whereas *pra-√viś* confines entry to the possession of particular parts or abodes (*āyatana*) in the body, which are matched to the equally circumscribed function of each deity, *pra-√pad* marks an act of entry that goes beyond its association with the crown of the head to suffuse the entire body to completion.

Another example of the selective employment of *pra-√viś* and *pra-√pad* appears at AitĀ 2.1.4, where it again indicates a conceptualized distinction between *brahman* and the deities that is grounded in terms of the extent and quality of their entrance into the person. This rather long passage occurs in an early part of the larger complex known as the *Mahaitareya Upaniṣad* and employs Sanskrit etymologies that provide its ontological deliberations with forward impetus and result in a distinctively interwoven verbal texture.

*taṃ prapadābhyāṃ prāpadyata brahmemāṃ puruṣaṃ yat prapadābhyāṃ
prāpadyata brahmemāṃ puruṣaṃ tasmāt prapade tasmāt prapade ity
ācakṣate śaphaḥ khurā ity anyeṣāṃ paśūnām / tad ūrdhvam udasarpāt tā
ūrū abhavatām / uru gṛṇhīty abravīt tad udaram abhavat / urv eva me kurv*

possession or obtainment of the body (see F. Smith 200a6: 195). Note also the following occurrences in Sāyaṇa's commentary: *imaṃ puruṣaṃ manuṣyadehaṃ praviṣṭāḥ* "they entered this person, the body of the man," and *saṃpūrṇā eva jāyante* "they are born completely filled" (Phaḍke 1898: 54).

²³³ F. Smith 2006a: 238 n.72.

ity abravūt tad uro 'bhavat / udaram brahmeti śārkarākṣyā upāsate
hrdayam brahmety āruṇayo brahmāhaiva tā³i / ūrdhvam tv evodasarpat tac
chiro 'śrayata yac chiro 'śrayata tac chiro 'bhavat tac chirasah śirastvam /
tā etāḥ śīrṣaṇ chriyaḥ śritās cakṣuḥ śrotram mano vāk prāṇaḥ / śrayante
'smiṇ chriyo ya evaṃ etac chirasah śirastvam veda / tā ahimsantāham
uktham asmy aham uktham asmīti / tā abruvan hantāsmāc charīrād
utkrāmāma tad yasmin na utkrānta idaṃ śarīram patsyati tad uktham
bhaviṣyatīti / vāg udakrāmad avadann aśnan pibann āstaiva / cakṣur
udakrāmad apaśyann aśnan pibann āstaiva / śrotram udakrāmad aśṇvann
aśnan pibann āstaiva / mana udakrāman mīlita ivāśnan pibann āstaiva /
prāṇa udakrāmat tat prāṇa utkrānte 'padyata / tad aśryatāśārītūṃ³ tac
charīram abhavat tac charīrasya śarīratvam / śīryate ha vā asya dviṣan
pāpmā bhrātrīvyo bhavati ya evaṃ veda / tā ahimsantaivāham uktham asmy
aham uktham asmīti / tā abruvan hantedaṃ punaḥ śarīram praviśāma tad
yasmin naḥ prapanna idaṃ śarīram utthāsyati tad uktham bhaviṣyatīti / vāk
prāviśad aśayad eva / cakṣur prāviśad aśayad eva / manaḥ prāviśad
aśayad eva / prāṇaḥ prāviśat tat prāṇe prapanna udatiṣṭhat tad uktham
abhavat / tad etad ukthāṃ³ prāṇa eva / prāṇa uktham eva vidyāt / taṃ devā
abruvaṃs tvam uktham asi tvam idaṃ sarvaṃ asi tava vayaṃ smas tvam
asmākam iti / tad apy etad ṛṣinoktam / tvam asmākam tava smas iti // AitĀ
2.1.4

Brahman entered (*prāpadyata*) that [man] through the tips of his feet (*prapadābhyām*); it is because *brahman* entered this person through the tips of the feet that they are the “tips of the feet” (*prapade*) and one calls them *prapade*, but those of other animals are called “hoofs” or “claws.” Then he snaked upward (*ūrdhvam*), and that became the thighs (*ūrū*). “Swallow widely (*uru*)” he said, and that became the stomach (*udaram*). “Make it spacious (*uru*) for me,” he said, and that became the chest (*uras*). The Śārkarākṣyas honor *brahman* as the stomach, the Āruṇis, *brahman* as the heart – the two are *brahman*, certainly. But he snaked even higher until he settled (*aśrayata*) at the head (*śiras*); when he settled at the head it became the head, and state of being *śiras* came to belong to the head. So these marks of royalty (*śri*) settled (*śrita*) at the top (*śīrṣam*) – sight, hearing, the mind, speech and *prāṇa* – and these marks of royalty settle in the one who thus knows why head has the state of being *śiras*. They struck at each other, saying “I am the hymn! I am the hymn!” They said: “Look! We have to depart from this body, and then the one at whose departure this body collapses will be the hymn.” Speech departed, but it just went on eating and drinking silently. Sight departed, but it just went on eating and drinking blindly. Hearing departed, but it just went on eating and drinking deafly. Mind departed, but it just went on eating and drinking, comatose. *Prāṇa* departed; and when *prāṇa* departed, it fell down. It decayed (*aśryata*); and as they were saying “it has decayed (*aśarī*),” it became the body (*śarīra*) and the state of being *śarīra* came to belong to the body. The hateful, evil adversary of one who knows this indeed decays (or) becomes the hateful, evil adversary of another. Those (marks of royalty) struck at each other again, saying “I am the hymn! I am the hymn!” And they said:

“Look! We must enter (*praviśāma*) this body again, and then the one at whose entrance (*prapanna*) this body rises will be the hymn.” Speech entered (*prāviśat*), but it just lay there. Sight entered, but it just lay there. Hearing entered, but it just lay there. Mind entered, but it just lay there. *Prāṇa* entered (*prāviśat*); and when *prāṇa* entered (*prapanna*) it stood up, so that became the hymn. So *prāṇa* alone is the hymn. One should know just this – that *prāṇa* is the hymn. Those gods said to it: “You are the hymn, you are all of this (*idaṃ sarvam*), we are yours, you are ours!” This too was said by a ṛṣi: “You are ours, we are yours.”²³⁴

The consistency with which the lexical stems *pra-√viś* and *pra-√pad* are employed and differentiated attests not only to the polarity of the bounded and unbounded identities of the deities and *brahman* respectively, but also clarifies the grounds on which *prāṇa* is conceptually distinguished within the hierarchy of deities. As will be seen, this allows *prāṇa* to be mapped alongside *brahman*, the cosmos (*idaṃ sarvam*) and language, whilst at the same time preserving its individual identity and function. However, while the unstable and temporary collocation of elements and substances that comprise the *puruṣa* are emanations of *brahman* and, when properly understood as such, are correlated with the goal of directly realizing the true nature of the *ātman*, their distinct identities are rarely treated in studies of these texts as possessing much of final soteriological value. This is because their appearance as independent and appetite for the world give rise to the very epistemological fallacies that the Upaniṣads aim to overcome: the apparent multiplicity of identities is ultimately seen through and loses validity upon its subsuming within *brahman*; and in this respect is not dissimilar to the later problematizing of *prakṛti* in the metaphysical explanations of Sāṃkhya.

Yet the weight of the above passages suggests that more is at play. When the body, possessed by the deities and their substance-codes, is permeated by the self, the process of creation presented by AitĀ 2.4.1-3 is not only reversed but brought to a state of completion. A similar process appears in ŚāṅkhĀ 11.1-2, a slightly later passage that presents Prajāpati as the creator and includes the identification between *brahman* and *ātman* within an extended and somewhat modified list of the deities and abodes that constitute the person. As in AitĀ 2.4.1-2, the disembodiment of these deities appears in conjunction with their self-

²³⁴ The reference is to ṚV 8.92.32.

volition to introduce the vexing issue of what constitutes a sustainable ontology; this bears strongly upon our consideration of how the particularities of this model of embodiment provide the driving force behind Vedic practices of self-transformation.

om prajāpatir vā imaṃ puruṣam udañcata tasminn etā devatā āveśayad vācy agniṃ prāṇe vāyum apāne vaidyutam udāne parjanyaṃ cakṣuṣy ādityaṃ manasi candramasaṃ śrotre diśaḥ śarīre pṛthivīm retasy apo bala indraṃ manyāv īśānaṃ mūrdhany ākāśam ātmani brahma sa yathā mahān amṛtakumbhaḥ pinvamānas tiṣṭhed evaṃ haiva samuttasthāv atha hemā devatā īkṣāṃ cakrire kim ayam asmābhiḥ puruṣaḥ kariṣyati kiṃ vā vayam anena hantāsmāc charīrād utkramāmeti tā hoccakramur hedaṃ śarīraṃ riktam iva parisuṣiraṃ sa hekṣāṃ cakre prajāpatir randhrāya na kṣamam hantāham imā aśanāyāpipāsābhyām upasṛjā³ iti tā hopasṛje tā hopasṛṣṭāḥ sukham alabhamānā imam eva puruṣam punaḥ pratyāviviṣuḥ // ŚāṅkhĀ 11.1

Om. Prajāpati raised up this person and made these deities enter (*āveśayad*) him: in speech, fire; in the out-breath (*prāṇa*), wind; in the in-breath, lightning; in the rising-breath, rain; in sight, the sun; in the mind, the moon; in hearing, the directions; in the decomposing body, the earth; in semen, the waters; in strength, Indra; in temper, Īśāna; in the skull, space; and in the self, *brahman*. Just as a magnificent jar of ambrosia would stand, swelling, so he rose up altogether. Now these deities considered: “What will this person (*puruṣa*) do with us, or we with him? Look, we must depart from this body (*śarīra*).” And they departed. Now this body was quite empty and pierced all around. Prajāpati reflected: “It is not able to endure this opening – come, I will let loose upon them with hunger and thirst.” So he let loose upon them; and they, having been let loose upon and finding no contentment, re-entered (*pratyāviviṣuḥ*) this person.

The deities described here are not those that enter the person in the AitĀ’s account, which were bodily functions, but instead consist of an array of elemental, spatial and cosmological features and personalities that are associated with the macrocosm. Although this account of entry and exit thus occurs at a different level within the hierarchical cosmos of the texts, the person is nonetheless reduced to an empty and perforated encasing – the physiological functions of the body together with the *ātman* are themselves dependent upon a transaction of identity through possession, and on this issue the subsequent paragraph of the narrative is clear: when those macrocosmic deities enter the

functions and the *ātman*, then “as a magnificent green tree stands with its roots moistened, so [that person] rose up altogether” (*sa yathā mahān vṛkṣa ārdra upasiktamūlas tiṣṭhed evaṃ haiva samuttasthau*, ŚāṅkhĀ 11.2).

Read in conjunction, these passages from the AitĀ and ŚāṅkhĀ indicate that the relationship between *puruṣa* and *ātman* is not a binary opposed on grounds of difference in substantiality, but rather entails a co-dependent mutuality that arises from the nested transactions through which both the activity and reality of *brahman* is revealed.²³⁵ It is this multiplicity of relationships contained within the complex structures of personhood, not the self hidden behind the curtain of senses, that comprises the fullness of identity with *brahman* that is expressed in each form or manifestation. Here, integration into *brahman* does not lessen the reality of the person. Rather, embodiment integrates and relates *brahman* to its creation. This defines a model of self-realization that is at once immanent and transcendent, and is actualized equally through the interaction of these multiple identities in life and their stepping out (*ut-√kram*) of the body at death.

Furthermore, the claims made by these texts require that the macrocosmic evolutes are literally present in the person: the person as microcosm is not a replica of the cosmos with bodily functions that correspond on miniature scale to their macrocosmic equivalents, but through repeated acts of entry is substantially possessed by those evolutes in the same way as they are by the deities comprising bodily functions. Although the texts we are concerned with are chronologically much earlier, this would remain cognizant with accounts of personhood contained in the Sanskrit epics and Tantras; it may also be suggested by the selective use of the adjective *mahan* – which is cognate with the English “magnificent” and overlaps semantically with *brahman* in its sense of “expansive” – in its analogous application to the *puruṣa* that rises up altogether.²³⁶ Having been possessed by “all of this,” *idaṃ sarvam*, in the very beginning, the person is an integrity of various relationships and identities in action, which through the countervailing movements of the deities and *brahman* inside and outside of the body disclose

²³⁵ Marriot 1976: 113: “In the cosmic *brahman* there inheres both power or energy as an embracing code (*puruṣa*) for transactions among the differentiated genera of beings whose substances, codes, and powers emanate from the *brahman*.”

²³⁶ White 2009: 172-77.

personhood as a potential state of living revelation. The substance-code of each embodied deity directly contributes to personal identity; and this co-extension between person and world magnifies the self in the body, making it functionally as expansive as *brahman*. Thus, in AitĀ 2.1.2:

*uktham uktham iti vai prajā vadanti tad idam evoktham iyam eva pṛthivīto
hīdaṃ sarvaṃ uttiṣṭhati yad idam kiñca / tasyāgnir arko 'nnam aśītayo
'nnena hīdaṃ sarvaṃ aśnute / antarikṣam evoktham antarikṣaṃ vā anu
patanty antarikṣam anu dhāvayanti tasya vāyur arko 'nnam aśītayo 'nnena
hīdaṃ sarvaṃ aśnute / asāv eva dyaru uktham amutaḥ pradānād dhīdaṃ
sarvaṃ uttiṣṭhati yad idaṃ kiñca tasyāsāv ādityo 'rko 'nnam aśītayo
'nnena hīdaṃ sarvaṃ aśnute / ity adhidaivatam / athādhyātmam / puruṣa
evoktham ayam eva mahān prajāpatir aham uktham asmīti vidyāt / tasya
mukham evokthaṃ yathā pṛthivī tathā / tasya vāg arko 'nnam aśītayo
'nnena hīdaṃ sarvaṃ aśnute / nāsike evokthaṃ yathāntarikṣe tathā / tasya
prāṇo 'rko 'nnam aśītayo 'nnena hīdaṃ sarvaṃ aśnute / tad etad
bradhnyasya viṣṭapaṃ yad etan nāsikāyai vinatam iva / lalātam evoktham
yathā dyaus tathā / tasya cakṣur arko 'nnam aśītayo 'nnena hīdaṃ sarvaṃ
aśnute / samānam aśītayo 'dhyātmam cādhidaivataṃ cānnam evānnena
hīmāni sarvāṇi bhūtāni samanantūṃ³ annenemaṃ lokaṃ jayaty annenāmuṃ
tasmāt samānam aśītayo 'dhyātmam cādhidaivataṃ cānnam eva / tad idam
annam annādam iyam eva pṛthivīto hīdaṃ sarvaṃ uttiṣṭhati yad idaṃ kiñca
/ yad dha kiñcedaṃ prertā³i tad asau sarvaṃ atti yad u kiñcātaḥ praitūṃ³
tad iyaṃ sarvaṃ atti seyam ity ādyātrī / attā ha vā ādyo bhavati / na
tasyeṣe yan nādyād yad vainaṃ nādyuḥ // AitĀ 2.1.2*

“Hymn! Hymn!” the offspring say – this is the hymn, for from this earth it all this rises, whatever there is. Its praise is fire, the eighty verses its food, for through food one arrives at all this. The space in-between is the hymn, [for] across that space they fly, and along that space they drive; its praise is the wind, the eighty verses its food, for through food one arrives at all this. That heaven is the hymn, for from its gift all this rises, whatever there is. Its praise is that sun, the eighty verses its food, for through food one arrives at all this. So it is with respect to the divine. Now, with respect to oneself. The person is the hymn, [for] this (person) indeed is magnificent (*mahān*) [and] is Prajāpati; one should know that they are the hymn. Its mouth is the hymn such as is the earth. Its praise is speech, the eighty verses its food, for through food one arrives at all this. Its nostrils are the hymn such as is the space in-between. Its praise is *prāṇa*, the eighty verses its food, for through food one arrives at all this. The part of the nose that curves in is the zenith of the sun.²³⁷ The brow is the hymn such as is heaven. Its praise is the eye, the eighty verses its food, for through food one arrives at all this. The eighty verses are alone the food with respect equally (*samānam*) to the divine and to oneself, for through food all these

²³⁷ I take the Sanskrit to refer to the radix of the nose: the part that “‘curves’ as it were (*iva*).”

beings breath (*samananti*), through food one conquers this world and that, and therefore the eighty verses are alone the food with respect equally to the divine and to oneself. This food and feeder are this earth, for from it all this rises, whatever there is. Whatever goes this way, that [heaven] eats it all; whatever goes that way, this [earth] eats it all – this, the earth, is food and feeder. The person becomes both the feeder and the food. He will not be master of that which he does not eat or which does not eat him.

Once more according to the account presented in AitĀ 2.4.3, when the *ātman* surveys the beings (*bhūta*) that occupy the body’s internal landscape, what it sees there is identified as the whole world (*idam*).²³⁸ This powerful coterminous extension (*vibhūti*) between the embodied and disembodied aspects of creation is an underlying theme of passages addressing the true identity of the person, where it correlates with descriptions of how a person’s “knowing self” (*prajñātman*) steps out of the body at death in the same manner as do the deities and bears upon the conceptualization of possession as a framework and foundation of self-identity understood and enacted. Far from foremost being rhetorical devices aimed at communicating the singular reality lying behind all worldly appearances and indicating the exclusive role of the *ātman* in personal identity as it is both pre-given and then subsequently realized, these creation stories explicate a conceptual terrain in Vedic soteriological practice according to which the identification of the self as *brahman* does not and cannot stand alone: it is the interaction between the *puruṣa*’s possession by animating forces and its pervasion by the unlimited self-reflexivity of the *ātman* that allows for a multileveled realization in which the integrative vision of *brahman* is directly revealed through the living structures of human being. According to the passages surveyed here and below, the truth of a person’s self “cannot be expressed except by its multiplicity”²³⁹ – expressed, that is, through a fluctuating antinomian embodiment that is liable to expand or contract in ways that may be expected or unexpected, integrative or disintegrative, magical or soteriological, but are consistently compelling, deeply ritualized, and entirely enabled by the particularities of how this all began.

²³⁸ See Olivelle (1998: 579 n.1) on the reading of *idam* in AitU 1.3.13 (= AitĀ 2.4.3).

²³⁹ F. Smith 2006a: 203.

Temporary Persons

If it can viably be argued that the Āraṇyakas' ruminations on primordial creation implicitly contain a paradigm for self-realization that integrates *puruṣa* and *ātman* in the shared space of personal identity, and I believe that it can, then what needs to be addressed is the matter of how the shifting structures of embodiment are related to soteriological practices, and in what capacity. Can the epistemological shifts – the insightful and all-encompassing intelligence, *prajñā* – that so typically characterize attainment across Indic religious traditions be located and explained in bodily terms? And given the fundamental divergence between traditional and modern understandings of what embodiment actually entails, how might the perspectives on disembodiment presented in these Āraṇyakas clarify the dynamics involved in Vedic revelation? These questions lead us directly into the landscape of how Sanskrit *vis à vis* revelatory language was conceived of and, more importantly, engaged with prior to its Sanskritization through the lens of brahmanical orthodoxy – prior, that is, to the insertion of a retrospectively conceptualized division of *laukika* and *vaidika* into alternative worlds.

Leaving the Body Altogether: Prāṇa and the Deities

We turn now to a selection of passages that illuminate some of the textual routes by which embodiment intersected directly with epistemology, thereby influencing the framework surrounding the Āraṇyakas' deliberations on knowledge, immortality, and the acquisition of extraordinary powers. An initial suggestion of transformative knowledge as having been conceived of as a bodily phenomenon appeared in AitĀ 2.1.4, translated above. To briefly recap: according to this narrative, the deities that occupy and thereby animate the body are all limited in contrast to *brahman*; and all enter (*pra-√viś*) from without as individuated disembodied essences. Amongst themselves, however, they are not only distinguished by their respective contribution to the arising of a person – speaking, hearing, thinking, and so on – but also by the reach or extent of their

respective identities. In keeping with a recurring theme in the soteriology of the Āraṇyakas, the deities engage in a struggle to know which among them is the “hymn” – an ontological status recalling both the transcendent nature of the Veda and the super-motility of the *mantras*, *pace* Vāc, as they course between worlds – and proceed to successively step out (*ut-√kram*) of the body to see at whose departure it will fall. At each instance of departure it is only the respective contribution of the departed deity that is lost; this continues until *prāṇa* exits and the body collapses. The sequence is then reversed, although with the difference that as they re-enter (*pra-√viś*), the body does not resume the activity associated with each deity now present but continues to lie there – until the entry of *prāṇa*, that is, which is then declared to be the hymn.

The simple translation of *prāṇa* as breath logically accounts for the revitalization of the body; what it fails to do, however, is capture the full conceptualization of *prāṇa* indicated by the language of employed in AitĀ 2.1.4, quoted above. This passage conclusively states:

Prāṇa entered (*prāviśat*); and when *prāṇa* entered (*prapanna*) it stood up (*udatiṣṭhat*), so that became the hymn (*uktham*). So *prāṇa* alone is the hymn. Those gods (the other deities) said to it: “You are the hymn, you are all of this (*idaṃ sarvam*), we are yours, you are ours!” This too was said by a ṛṣi: “You are ours, we are yours.”

The appearance of *prapanna*, a nominal derivative of *pra-√pad*, shifts the focus of *prāṇa*’s identification from the physiological function of breath to the pervasive nature of its entry. As seen previously with respect to *brahman*, this use of *pra-√pad* indicates not only that *prāṇa* is extensive in its macrocosmic identity, but that this quality of extensiveness is retained when *prāṇa* enters the body; this sets *prāṇa* aside from the other deities, whose identities become constrained within the limits of their respective bodily abodes. *Prāṇa* is thus established as a physical entity that actively reveals the *puruṣa*’s interweaving with the universe and courses freely, as wind (*vāyu*), throughout the layers of the cosmos. In both these respects, *prāṇa* is akin to the Vedic revelation that moves between the ṛṣi and the conjunction of god (*devatā*) and meter (*chandas*) to complete the circuit of pervasion “between entities of different essentiality and

density of substance”²⁴⁰ and defines the hymn as an verbal embodiment of *ṛta*, the truth that “essentially defines what a being or object is and what it does, and...structures the relationships of being and objects with other beings and objects.”²⁴¹

Another passage, AitĀ 2.1.5, utilizes a series of etymological substitutions that define *prāṇa* from the perspective of its ability to extend. To regard this exchange of phonological similarities as a mere literary embellishment would be to seriously underestimate the revelatory nature of this statement about the way things really are and the essential role of language in embodying the hidden connections that pervade the Vedic universe.²⁴² The overlapping between *pra-√nī* (to lead or guide forward), *pra-√tan* (Pass., to be extended or stretched), *prātar* (daybreak, dawn) and *prāṇa* is therefore not coincidental, but fundamentally truthful with respect equally to language and the phenomena described. According to this passage, then, it is extension both as a movement and as an ontological quality that describes *prāṇa* in the physical space of the world, of which the body is the smallest unit; it also accounts for the further coherence of *prāṇa* in the temporal association between days and breaths.

taṃ devāḥ prāṇayanta sa praṇītaḥ prāyāta prātāyītīṃ³ tat prātar abhavat samāgād itīṃ³ tat sāyam abhavat ahar eva prāṇo rātrir apānaḥ | AitĀ 2.1.5

The gods led that [entity] forward (*prāṇayanta*), and once it had been led forward (*praṇītaḥ*), it was extended (*prāyāta*). Exclaiming, “it has extended! (*prātāyī*),” that became the break of day (*prātar*); exclaiming “it went away! (*samāgād*),” that became the close of the day (*sāyam*). The breath that reaches forward (*prāṇa*) is the day; the breath that travels downward (*apāna*), the night.

This characteristic comprehensiveness of *prāṇa* is highlighted particularly by its depiction as an entity that is simultaneously identifiable as the wind, as the entire collection of subtle winds, airs or breaths that permeate the body, and as one particular within that collection, namely, the breath (*ana*) that reaches forward

²⁴⁰ F. Smith 2006a: 176-79, also 232 n. 4.

²⁴¹ Jamison and Brereton 2014: 22 (vol. 1).

²⁴² Ibid.: 24 (vol. 1).

(*pra-*) or extends. Unlike the deities, which undergo a marked transition in identity – their boundaries renegotiated by location and function – when they cross the threshold into the body, *prāṇa* includes within itself a whole and integrated personality.²⁴³ The consistency of identity thus demonstrated by *prāṇa* relates it to *brahman* and Vāc (language in its principle or deified form), which are mutually implicated in revelation as a process with subjective and objective dimensions. It is clear in AitĀ 2.3.3 that *prāṇa*'s multivalence is established upon its motility: firstly, as one of the five elemental substances comprising the person, it is the macrocosmic wind outside the body; this macrocosmic wind is then identified as consisting of the various *internal* breaths that move within the body; finally, the deities enter (*ni-√viś*) – but do not possess – the primary functions of exhalation and inhalation, which, the text states, pour out (or enter the other worlds, *api-√i*) when *prāṇa* withdraws.

*sa eṣa puruṣaḥ pañcavidhas tasya yad uṣṇaṃ taj jyotir yāni khāni sa ākāśo
'tha yal lohitaṃ śleṣmā retas tā āpo yac charīraṃ sā pṛthivī yaḥ prāṇaḥ sa
vāyur / sa eṣa vāyuh pañcavidhaḥ prāṇo 'pāno vyāna udānaḥ samānaḥ / tā
etā devatāḥ prāṇāpānayoḥ eva niviṣṭāś cakṣuḥ śrotraṃ mano vāg iti
prāṇasya hy anvapāyam etā apiyanti / AitĀ 2.3.3*

This person is fivefold: what of him is hot is light, what are apertures are space; now, blood, mucus and semen are the waters, the decomposing body is the earth and *prāṇa* is the wind. This wind is fivefold: the forward-reaching breath (*prāṇa*), the downward-moving breath (*apāna*), the circulating breath (*vyāna*), the upward-moving breath (*udāna*) and the equalizing breath (*samāna*). These deities – sight, hearing, mind, speech – have entered into (*niviṣṭāś*) the forward-reaching breath and the downward-moving breath, for these pour out [of the body] with *prāṇa*'s withdrawal.

This image of the deities entering *prāṇa* and being transported or guided by it out of the body is not an isolated incidence; and nor does it describe a phenomenon that is limited to the involvement of the deities in the body alone. ŚāṅkhĀ 4.12-13 speaks of a related phenomenon called *parimara*, the “dying round” of the cosmological and embodied deities, which describes *brahman*'s luminous appearance in the deities and its transition from one location to another

²⁴³ F. Smith (2006a: 212) on “transfer of essence.”

in accordance with the manifestation of their respective and definitively encoded functions or characteristics. Put simply, the vision of cyclicity codified in *parimara* explains imperishability from within the perspective of mortality. As the nature of the transfers described here are quite tellingly distinct from the primary processes of embodiment involved in the event of creation, and because the repetitions in the text themselves make certain claims, it is worth taking this fairly long account in its entirety.

athāto daivaḥ parimaraḥ etad vai brahma dīpyate yad agnir jvalaty athaitan mriyate yan na jvalati tasyādītyam eva tejo gacchati vāyum prāṇa etad vai brahma dīpyate yad ādityo drśyate 'thaitan mriyate yan na drśyate tasya candramasam eva tejo gacchati vāyum prāṇa etad vai brahma dīpyate yac candramā drśyate 'thaitan mriyate yan na drśyate tasya vidyutam eva tejo gacchati vāyum prāṇa etad vai brahma dīpyate yad vidyud vidyotate 'thaitan mriyate yan na vidyotate tasyā diśa eva tejo gacchati vāyum prāṇas tā vā etāḥ sarvā devatā vāyum eva praviśya vāyau mṛtvā na mṛcchante tasmād eva punar udīrata ity adhidaivatam athādhyātmanam // 12 // etad vai brahma dīpyate yad vācā vadaty athaitan mriyate yan na vadati tasya cakṣur eva tejo gacchati prāṇam prāṇa etad vai brahma dīpyate yac cakṣuṣā paśyaty athaitan mriyate yan na paśyati tasya śrottram eva tejo gacchati prāṇam prāṇa etad vai brahma dīpyate yan manasā dhyāyaty athaitan mriyate yan na dhyāyati tasya prāṇam eva tejo gacchati prāṇam prāṇas tā vā etāḥ sarvā devatāḥ prāṇam eva praviśya prāṇe mṛtvā na mṛcchante tasmād eva punar udīrate tad yad iha vā evaṃ vidvāṃsam ubhau parvatāv abhipravarteyātām dakṣiṇas cottaras ca tustūrṣamāṇau na hainaṃ strṇvīyātām atha ya enaṃ dviṣanti yāṃś ca svayaṃ dveṣti ta evainaṃ parimriyante // ŚāṅkhĀ 4.12-13

Next, the divine dying round. This *brahman* shines when fire blazes and dies when it blazes not; its *tejas* goes to the sun, its *prāṇa* to the wind. This *brahman* shines when the sun is visible and dies when it is not visible; its *tejas* goes to the moon, its *prāṇa* to the wind. This *brahman* shines when the moon is visible and dies when it is not visible; its *tejas* goes to lightning, its *prāṇa* to the wind. This *brahman* shines when lightning flashes and dies when it flashes not; its *tejas* goes to the directions, its *prāṇa* to the wind. All of these deities, entering just the wind and dying in the wind, do not perish – thus, they rise again. So it is with respect to the deities; now, with respect to oneself. This *brahman* shines when one speaks with speech and dies when one does not speak. Its *tejas* goes to the eye, its *prāṇa* to *prāṇa*. This *brahman* shines when one sees with the eye and dies when one does not see; its *tejas* goes to the ear, its *prāṇa* to *prāṇa*. This *brahman* shines when one hears with the ear and dies when one does not hear; its *tejas* goes to the mind, its *prāṇa* to *prāṇa*. This *brahman* shines when one thinks with the mind and dies when one does

not think; its *tejas* goes to *prāṇa*, its *prāṇa* goes to *prāṇa*. All of these deities, entering just *prāṇa* and dying in *prāṇa*, do not perish – thus, they rise again. Even if both mountain-ranges in this world, the southern and northern, were to advance upon one who is a knower of this, seeking to lay him low, they would not overthrow him; so, those who hate him and who he himself hates die round him.

In comparison to the accounts of creation examined above, which were concerned with archetypes in the background of a remote beginning, *parimara* explains an ongoing natural occurrence and thus captures subtle distinctions in the conceptualization of the various entities and substances which are at work in the body and the cosmos in the present time and together make up the spatial, conceptual and dynamic context of real-world soteriological practices. These distinctions pertain specifically to *tejas* and *prāṇa* in contrast to the deities, and two general differences may be noted. First, with the exception of multivalent *prāṇa*, the movement of the deities is limited to entering and exiting their associated abodes – with respect to both levels of their manifestation, *adhidaivatam* and *adhyātmam*, the identity of the deities constrains them within their vertically encoded streams, following which no aspect of their substantiality is able to move or transfer sideways, for example, from sun to moon or from speech to sight. This constraint gives rise to the vexing problem of how the incorporation that is achieved within the encompassing structure of the body and which discloses *brahman* is to be sustained either in spite of the cessation of a deity's activity or beyond death. In contrast to the deities, *tejas* and *prāṇa* display the following interrelated characteristics: (1) they are not identified with any one locus and do not manifest in cosmos-specific forms, and therefore are not bound either vertically or horizontally; (2) they do not contribute to the identity of the *puruṣa*, but are in effect within the *puruṣa*'s activity; (3) their presence is conditional upon the shining of *brahman*, which can cease in a given location but weaves throughout the universe and is imperishable; (4) this transition across locations is reflected by the employment of the verbal root \sqrt{gam} , to go, and does not carry the suggestion of entry and possession that is reserved for entities or substances of limited identity; (5) they exhibit similarity to the abstract phenomena (the flood, the glittering specks, etc.) emitted by *brahman* in the

initial stages of creation, which preceded the formation of the three worlds and were suggestive of subtle movements of light, time and fluid; and (6) their movement is also regulated by subtle similarities in movement, namely, radiation or projection in the case of *tejas* and ethereal flowing in the case of *prāṇa*.

A second distinction may be noted in the comparison between *tejas* and *prāṇa*. *Tejas* is an active and creative luminosity, whose extension in rays is influential both in later contact-based (*prāpyakāri*) theories of perception and Epic accounts of yogis and supernatural power.²⁴⁴ According to the passage above, *tejas* moves along a chain of locations whose activity likewise is characteristically radiating or projective and which *tejas* itself then radiates through. In this regard, *tejas* manifests through bodies; and the unviability of its potential for disembodied activity is highlighted by the fact that it is depicted as finally making its way to *vāyu* or *prāṇa*. *Prāṇa*, however, repeatedly goes either to *vāyu* or to itself, with both entities displaying such a high degree of intrinsic motility that they pervade the microcosm and macrocosm alike, being equally active in their embodied and disembodied states. The almost indistinguishable phenomenology of *vāyu/prāṇa*, which is grounded in the terms of their innate ability to flow between worlds and across bodily thresholds whilst preserving the individuation and different substantiality of the deities, encodes this vision of an ontological apotheosis – immortality through ascension to the heavenly world – as a natural event. This encoding of *prāṇa*'s dynamic activity both inside and outside of the body naturalizes the conception of *prāṇa* as the instrumental agency by which apotheosis occurs; to the extent that this agency is naturalized, it can be predicted; and to the extent that it is predictable, it is able to be codified within practices of self-realization.²⁴⁵

Prāṇa and Prajñātman

Although the focus on *prāṇa* undoubtedly reflects historical developments in the conceptualization of the body, and in particular the increasing turn towards

²⁴⁴ See F. Smith 2006a: 215; White 2009: 125, 138, 146, 287 n. 190, also 2012: 61-76.

²⁴⁵ This discussion is influenced by F. Smith 2006a: 215.

identifying ritual technologies with internal physiological functions, it is consistent with the general tenor of both Ṛgvedic Āraṇyakas, in all their parts, including the more explicitly ritualistic early books of the *Aitareya*. For example, these implications of *prāṇa* are drawn out through an interlinear interpretation of verse 38 of ṚV 1.164, which appears in AitĀ 2.18 and pertains to the performance of this hymn as part of the Mahāvratā proceedings. Stating firstly that it is “death and immortality” (*sa eṣa mṛtyuś caivāmṛtaṃ ca*), the speaker of this passage goes on to describe *prāṇa* as the embodied aspect of the immortal that travels to the distant heavenly world, yet remains identified with the level of the mortal *puruṣa* and, in accordance with the will of *brahman*, is prevented from going forth for so long as the person is living and breathing both in and out. The text is clear: it is necessary to comprehend *prāṇa* in the context of a binary interrelationship – an unobserved connection – between the mortal and the immortal, the person and the self, the body and the deity. To “know thus” is more than a matter of perception – it implicates a structural, physiological adaptation to epistemological shifts.

*tad uktam ṛṣiṇā / apān prān eti svadhayā gr̥bhīta ity apānena hy ayaṃ
yataḥ prāṇo na parān bhavati / amatyo martyena sayonir ity etena hīdaṃ
sarvaṃ sayoni martyāni hīmāni śarīrāṇīm³ amṛtaiśā devatā / tā śaśvantā
viṣūcīnā viyantā ny anyam cikyur na ni cikyur anyam iti nicinvanti
haivemāni śarīrāṇīm³ amṛtaivaiśa devatā / amṛto ha vā amuṣmiṃl loke
saṃbhavaty amṛtaḥ sarvebhyo bhūtebhyo dadṛṣe ya evaṃ veda ya evaṃ
veda // AitĀ 2.1.8*

This was said by a *ṛṣi*: “Inward and outward he goes, controlled by his own will” – for *prāṇa*, constrained by the downward-moving breath, does not go forth. “The immortal one, of the same womb as the mortal” – for through [the immortal *brahman*] all this is of the same womb: these bodies are mortal, this deity immortal. “Those two are ever going apart in different directions: they observe the one; they do not observe the other” – they observe these bodies, [but] this deity is immortal. He becomes immortal in that world and is seen as immortal by all beings, the one who knows thus, who knows thus.

In this respect, *prāṇa* displays remarkable adaptability, for these texts – like all stages in the transmission of the Vedic revelation – do not present a single cosmological vision, but rather a multifaceted spectrum of perspectives which

negotiate in various ways certain core impulses and intuitions that arise again and again across Indic religious traditions. Moreover, *prāṇa* is not just a topic, a theme addressed through the content of these texts, but is directly implicated in the affective life of revelation as a world-making activity, the activity of sensing the unseen dynamic connections that are true and real, and the activity of articulating them such that they are realized through changes within the space of the body. As an instrumental agency that is established within the body's physiology, providing both a foundation and the means to expand, adapt, and change, *prāṇa* facilitates a circuit of pervasion whereby the complex systems of personhood co-ordinate adaptively to *veda*, as knowledge and as revelation. The Vedic body – the body *as* Veda – is literally phenomenal.

Before taking up the question of how the physiological changes facilitated by *prāṇa* interpenetrate with language to bring Sanskrit into the body, emplacing revelation within the structures of personhood, it is necessary to briefly address *prāṇa* as it appears in contrast to the *ātman*, not only because they appear to display overlapping characteristics, but because the centrality of focus given to *prāṇa* raises the questions of what exactly here is the intended object of transformative knowledge, and how does this knowledge work? This bears strongly upon the interpretive framework through which we approach Sanskrit, for to the extent that the revelatory status of these texts lies upon the basis of *veda*, knowledge, and that this is inseparable from the language in which truth is fundamentally embodied or manifested, the identity of Sanskrit is bound not to what it represents but rather to what it does. Following the basic divisions invoked in our discussion so far, a point of comparison between *prāṇa*, as it appears in the Ṛgvedic Āraṇyakas, and the *ātman*, as it is typologically invoked in Indological scholarship (or generalized for the sake of undergraduate-level university students), is the matter of ontological positioning. As we have seen, *prāṇa* is usually either included among the deities or characterized in relation to them, which, in spite of their immortality, fall into the category of the person on account of the temporary and changeable nature of their configuration within the body that decomposes. Because the identity of the person is therefore limited temporally and, moreover, is permeable and fluid, *prāṇa* would appear to sit in

clear contradistinction to the *ātman*, the ultimate stability of which is born of its direct identification with *brahman*. Thus, although *prāṇa* is described as an immortal instrumental agency behind soteriological attainment, it nonetheless does not possess a complete and self-contained identity, which would require conservative identification with *brahman*. In this sense, *prāṇa* is the agency through which knowledge is enacted and assumes form, and the ontological basis for this soteriological function lies in its characteristic dynamics. An identification between *prāṇa* and *ātman* (the postulation that *prāṇa* here is the self or defines its substantiality) is not necessary as a prerequisite to this function, and nor does such an identification automatically follow from it.

While the substantiality of *prāṇa* and its function in regard to the *puruṣa* is then not entirely opaque, the matter of what precisely is intended by *ātman* remains to be addressed. In this respect, the comparison between the two can be furthered by turning attention to semantic developments in the meaning of *ātman* through the entire Vedic period. Although the equation of *ātman*/*brahman* as the ultimate identity or essence of the self has served as a cornerstone of metaphysical developments in the history of India's religious culture, it is a broadly attested fact that the term *ātman* does not carry this specification in the majority of Vedic literature, and nor is it consistently the case that when *ātman* is used to denote an ultimate "self" that the essence of this identity is constituted as *brahman*. Nor again does *ātman* function as a "gnomon" of *brahman* implanted within all beings. This is strikingly highlighted by AitĀ 2.6, in which *ātman* is identified with *prajñā* before being extended to *brahman* and the world via a panoptic list that expands from core consciousness, the centers of the body (heart, mind) and various psycho-mental functions, states and qualities to macrocosmic forms (gods, elements), and from there to the commingling of microcosm and macrocosm within all forms of life. While this enumeration leaves one with the impression of a universal identity behind all worldly appearances, the inseparability of *ātman* from the greater matrix of relationships finalizes the validity of those appearances.

ko 'yam ātmeti vayum upāsmāhe katarah sa ātmā / yena vā paśyati yena vā śṛṇoti yena vā gandhān ājighrati yena vā vācaṃ vyākaroti yena vā svādu

cāsvādu ca vijānāti / yad etad dhṛdayaṃ manaś caitat saṃjñānam ājñānaṃ vijñānaṃ prajñānaṃ medhā dṛṣṭir dhṛtir matir manīṣā jūtiḥ smṛtiḥ saṃkalpaḥ kratuḥ asuḥ kāmo vaśa iti / sarvāṇy evaitāni prajñānasya nāmadheyāni bhavanti / eṣa brahmaiṣa indra eṣa prajāpatiḥ ete sarve devā imāni ca pañca mahābhūtāni pṛthivī vāyur ākāśa āpo jyotīṣṭī etānīmāni ca kṣudramiśrāṇīva bījānītarāṇi cetarāṇi cāṇḍajāni ca jārujāni ca svedajāni codbhijjāni cāśvā gāvaḥ puruṣā hastino yat kiñcedaṃ prāṇi jaṅgamaṃ ca patatri ca yac ca sthāvaram sarvaṃ tat prajñānetraṃ prajñāne pratiṣṭhaṃ prajñānetro lokah prajñā pratiṣṭhā prajñānaṃ brahma // AitĀ 2.6

Who is the one we honor as the *ātman*, which of these is the *ātman*? Is it that by which one sees, by which one hears, by which one smells scents, by which one forms speech, by which one tells between sweet and sour? This heart and mind, this perception, injunction, discernment, intelligence, wisdom, vision, firmness, thought, conception, inclination, memory, resolve, determination, spirit, desire, wish? All these are just names of intelligence (*prajñā*). It is *brahman*, it is Indra, it is Prajāpati, it is all the gods and the five great elements – earth, wind, space, water, light – and it is [all of] these blended in the tiny, the seeds: every single variety of thing, whether born from eggs, from the womb, from sweat or by sprouting – horses, cows, people, elephants – whatever breathes, whether it walks or flies, and what is immobile. All of that is guided by *prajñā*, established on *prajñā*. The world is guided by *prajñā*; the foundation is *prajñā*; *brahman* is intelligence (*prajñāna*).

It is perhaps unsurprising that the metaphysical centrality of *ātman* should resound in such spatial and physical terms. As has been pointed out by a number of modern scholars of Vedic texts, *ātman* is the term “most frequently used with reference to a living breathing body” and is “liable to misunderstanding and mistranslating because it can also mean the spiritual self or the innermost core of a human being, besides functioning as a mere reflexive pronoun.”²⁴⁶ Malamoud elaborates this point with respect specifically to the employment of the term *ātman* in the Brāhmaṇas:

ātman, which is sometimes, not incorrectly, translated as “soul,” is not here the noncorporeal element of the person as contrasted with the material body (*tanū*, *śarīra*, or *deha*). *Ātman* is that in the body which is contrasted with the limbs (and the head), as the centre to the periphery, or else it is the whole as distinguished from the parts it encompasses. In this sense, *ātman* is the “person himself” (not my leg, nor even my heart, but

²⁴⁶ Olivelle 1998: 22.

“me”), and thus the body, to the extent that it supports reflexivity (*ātman*, like its synonym *tanū*, is used as a reflexive pronoun for all persons).²⁴⁷

Malamoud’s observations may well serve as a description of the employment of this term as it appears in the Ṛgvedic Āraṇyakas, where its frequent occurrences attest to a variety of intended points of reference, none of which are clearly explicated; furthermore, given the wide-ranging contents of these texts, *ātman*’s referential abstruseness is thrown into high relief. However, although this apparent lack of exactitude may suggest otherwise, a prominent feature of its use (overlapping again with *prāṇa*) is the consistency with which it directs attention to what is personal, obtaining at the level of the *puruṣa*, or has the potential to be personalized, encoded in the structures of a fluid personhood, as opposed to directing focus to something eternal and existing in isolation from what is changeable. Therefore, while knowledge and its embodied states (*veda*, *prajñā*) illumine what ultimately is real, its coincidence with *prāṇa*’s instrumentality and the polyvalence of the term *ātman* directly engages the congruent malleability of personal identity.

When viewed from this perspective, *ātman*’s spiraling multiplicity (self, essence, “me,” heart, body, core, nature, etc.) appears with pragmatic, metaphysical precision as it makes its claim for the reality of an identity whose truth hangs on the personal, temporal narrative through which immortality unfolds.²⁴⁸ In ŚāṅkhĀ 4.14, the passage that directly follows the discussion of *parimara* examined above, the motif of the deities entering and exiting the body acquires a pregnant sense of anticipation as it describes the one who possesses true knowledge (*vidvān*) of *prāṇa* as merging into *prāṇa* and blowing up into heaven together with the deities and their functions. In this convergence of bodily technologies and states – *prāṇa*, *prajñā*, *ātman* and *veda* – knowledge impacts on the person from within, with the full force of revelation emerging through a deeply patterned reconstruction of identity that sublimates individuality into the supra-individual structures of tradition, yet preserves the individual and the

²⁴⁷ Malamoud 1989: 97.

²⁴⁸ Patton (1990: 184) speaks of paradox, ambiguity and multivalency as “Vedic intentions.” These linguistic qualities point to extra-semantic characteristics or powers of *vāc*.

collocation of entities from which identity arises by means of their achievement of immortality.²⁴⁹

athāto niḥśreyasādānam etā ha devatā ahaṃśreyase vivadamānā asmāc charīrād uccakramus tad dha papāta śuṣkaṃ dārubhūtaṃ śīśye 'thainad vāk praviveśa tad vācāvadac śīśya evāthainac cakṣuḥ praviveśa tad vācāvadac cakṣuṣāpaśac śīśya evāthainac chrotraṃ praviveśa tad vācāvadac cakṣuṣāpaśyac chrotreṇa śṛṇvac chiśya evāthaitan manaḥ praviveśa tad vācāvadac cakṣuṣāpaśyac chrotreṇa śṛṇvan manasādhyāyac chiśya evāthainat prāṇaḥ praviveśa tat tata eva samuttasthau tā vā etāḥ sarvā devatāḥ prāṇe niḥśreyasaṃ viditvā prāṇaṃ eva prajñātmānam abhisambhūya sahaivaitaiḥ sarvair asmāc charīrād uccakramus vāyupratiṣṭhā ākāśātmānaḥ svar īyus tatho evainaṃ vidvān prāṇe niḥśreyasaṃ viditvā prāṇaṃ eva prajñātmānam abhisambhūya sahaivaitaiḥ sarvair asmāc charīrād utkrāmati sa vāyupratiṣṭha ākāśātmā svar eti sa tad gacchati yatraite devās tat prāpya yad amṛtā devās tad amṛto bhavati ya evaṃ veda // ŚāṅkhĀ 4.14

Next, the claiming of pre-eminence. The deities, disputing among themselves who was superior, departed from this body. It fell and lay there, as dry as a log. Now speech entered it, and it spoke with speech but just lay there. Now sight entered it, and it spoke with speech and saw with sight, but just lay there. Now hearing entered it, and it spoke with speech, saw with sight and heard with hearing but just lay there. Now the mind entered it, and it spoke with speech, saw with sight, heard with hearing and thought with the mind, but just lay there. Then *prāṇa* entered it, and because of that alone it rose up altogether. All of the deities, recognizing the pre-eminence of *prāṇa* and merging into *prāṇa*, the intelligent self (*prajñātmānam*), departed from this body together with all of these [faculties] and, established in the wind and identified with space, blew up into heaven. Exactly so does the knower of this, recognizing the pre-eminence of *prāṇa* and merging into *prāṇa*, the intelligent self, depart from this body together with all these [faculties] and, established in the wind and identified with space, blow up into heaven. He goes where the gods go, and gaining this becomes immortal as the gods are immortal, the one who knows thus.

²⁴⁹ Olivelle translates *sahaivaitaiḥ sarvair asmāc charīrād utkrāmati* as “departs from the body accompanied by all these” (1998: 345). The suggestion seems to be that the knower departs from the corporeal body and goes to heaven with the senses and their functions intact, i.e., still retaining the configuration of entities that animates the person in life; cf. ŚāṅkhĀ 3, 5 (= KṣU 1, 3). This is implicated in particular by the announcement in ŚāṅkhĀ 5.8 that just as in a chariot the rim is fastened to the spokes and the spokes to the hub, so the particles of being are fastened to the particles of intelligence, which are in turn fastened to *prāṇa* (*tad yathā rathasyāreṣu nemir arpitā nābhāvarā arpitā evaitā bhūtamātrāḥ prajñāmātrāsv arpitāḥ prajñāmātrāḥ prāṇe 'rpitāḥ*). If the pre-eminence of *prāṇa* and its immortality arise from the other deities’ adherence within it, and if the person gains immortality through an enactive knowledge of *prāṇa*, then this soteriological state would be inclusive of all deities together and in proper, functioning relationship.

The fact that this knowledge is conceived of as enactive is of great importance, because it illuminates embodiment as both an epistemological process and state attained within the temporal narrative of a person's life; in the words of Deutsch, reflecting on the role of traditional Sanskrit texts: "Knowledge...is something made; it is a genuine action (*karman*) in this existentialist sense: it is not so much that which is contained in a (justified, true) belief or statement, as that which becomes wholly real in one's life."²⁵⁰ However, as Flood notes of ascetic traditions worldwide, there is a "deep ambiguity" in soteriological practices of self-realization that focus on the interiorization of cosmological structures, for the achievement of interiority goes *beyond* subjectivity, yet simultaneously always entails subjectivity because it requires a real, living, historical subject *who* acts, speaks and knows, and in these ways expresses their own will or intent.²⁵¹ In this way, tradition is not opposed to individuality. Rather, it is suggested that in traditional cultures individuality is understood in dramatically different ways, and to this it may be added that the envisioning of the person as open, fluid, and subject to changes in psycho-physiological constitution that are imposed from without does not support the notion of self-contained individuality and independence that predominate in the de-traditionalized culture of modernity. It is, rather, the seamless co-ordination between the individual and supra-individual tradition that marks the fullest flourishing of personhood; and thus the *puruṣa*, as also the *ātman*, is "an index of tradition-specific subjectivity," albeit established at the antipodal nodes of change and continuity.²⁵²

²⁵⁰ Deutsch 1988: 166; Potter 1988: 29-30.

²⁵¹ Flood 2004; also Brereton 1990: 135: "...the Upanishads are a result of the very individuality they seem to compromise."

²⁵² Flood 2006: 12. These patterns are also familiar in Chinese culture; see Hall and Ames 1981; also 1998:32: "the lived body is the concrete and particular medium through which the substance of the tradition is expressed."

Subjectivities Specified by Language

The purpose behind this panoramic and meandering examination of *prāṇa* can now be stated. The impact of Sanskrit on the person is explained not by its ideational value as an authoritative relic of timeless tradition, and nor by sacred association with ritual, but by the dynamic operations of *prāṇa* between body and cosmos. The texts are clear on this matter. Firstly, the forward movement of speech, as one of the bodily deities, in its tangibly sonic, grammaticalized and cadent sensuality, is contingent upon *prāṇa*. *Prāṇa* reaches through speech; and speech enters into and is transported by *prāṇa*. Secondly, speech, as an aspect of language, gives *prāṇa* manifest form in shapes that are inextricably bound with the potential for revelation.

*tasya vāk tantir nāmāni dāmāni tad asyedaṃ vācā tantyā nāmabhir
dāmabhiḥ sarvaṃ sitaṃ sarvaṃ hīdaṃ nāmanīm³ sarvaṃ vācābhivadati /
vahanti ha vā enaṃ tantisaṃbaddhā ya evaṃ veda / tasyoṣṇig lomāni tvag
gāyatrī triṣṭum māṃsam anuṣṭup snāvāny asthi jagatī paṅktir majjā prāṇo
br̥hatī sa chandobhiś channo yac chandobhiś channas tasmāc chandāṃsīty
ācakṣate / chādayanti ha vā enaṃ chandāṃsi pāpāt karmaṇo yasyāṃ
kasyāñ cid diśi kāmāyate ya evaṃ etac chandasāṃ chandastvaṃ veda / tad
uktam ṛṣiṇā / apaśyaṃ gopāṃ ity eṣa vai gopā eṣa hīdaṃ sarvaṃ gopāyati
/ anipadyamānam iti na hy eṣa kadācana saṃviśati / ā ca parā ca pathibhiś
carantam ity ā ca hy eṣa parā ca pathibhiś carati / sa sadhrīcīḥ sa viṣūcīr
vasāna iti sadhrīcīś ca hy eṣa viṣūcīś ca vasta imā eva diśaḥ / ā varīvartti
bhuvaneṣv antar ity eṣa hy antar bhuvaneṣv āvarīvartti / atho āvṛtāso
'vatāso na kartṛbhir iti / sarvaṃ hīdaṃ prāṇenāvṛtam / so 'yam ākāśaḥ
prāṇena br̥hatyā viṣṭabdhas tad yathāyam ākāśaḥ prāṇena br̥hatyā
viṣṭabdha evaṃ sarvāni bhūtāny āpipīlikābhyaḥ prāṇena br̥hatyā
viṣṭabdhānīty evaṃ vidyāt // AitĀ 2.6*

Speech is its line, names the tethers²⁵³; so through speech, the line, and names, the tethers, all this is joined – for all this truly is names, through speech it [= *prāṇa*] names it all. Those that are bound together with the

²⁵³ The key to grasping this statement lies in the image conveyed by the nouns *tanti* and *dāman*, which Keith (1909) simplistically translates as “rope” and “knots.” It is possible that this was an attempt to distinguish the terms, which overlap semantically: both *tanti* and *dāman* carry the simple sense of a string, cord, rope or line. However, their subtleties are drawn out through reference back to the verbal roots from which they are derived, namely, \sqrt{tan} “to stretch or extend” and $\sqrt{dā}$ (4) “to bind”, from which we get *tanti* as a cord that is extended, and *dāman* as a string that binds. Taken together, these terms indicate that speech is conceived of as the pitching-line to which names are tethered, as animals. See MW 436:1 *tanti* sv.: “a cord, line, string (esp. a long line to which a series of calves are fastened by smaller cords).”

rope (of speech) carry the one who knows thus. His hairs are the *uṣṇih*, the *gāyatrī* his skin, his flesh the *triṣṭubh*, his veins the *anuṣṭubh*, the *jagatī* his bones, his marrow the *pañkti*, and the *br̥hatī* is *prāṇa*. He is covered (*channa*) by the meters (*chandās-*), and it is since he is covered by the meters that they are called *chandās*, “meters.” The meters cover him from evil action in whatever quarter he desires, the one who knows thus why the state of being *chandās* belongs to the meters. This was said by a *ṛṣi*²⁵⁴: “I saw the herdsman” – for it truly is the herdsman, it guards all this. “Who never settles down” – for it never rests. “Roaming here and afar along his paths” – for it roams here and afar along its paths. “Clothing himself in those that converge and diverge” – for he wears just these quarters that converge and diverge. “He moves back and forth among living beings” – for this moves back and forth among living beings. Then [there is the verse]²⁵⁵: “Like wells covered over by their makers.” For all this is covered with *prāṇa*. This ether is supported by *prāṇa*, the *br̥hatī*, and just as this ether is supported by *prāṇa*, the *br̥hatī*, so all beings down to ants are supported by *prāṇa*, the *br̥hatī* – one should know this to be so.

Because of the subtle complexity of the primary sources – recalling that these texts not only furnish us with descriptive accounts of revelation, but are revelation in all aspects – it is worth pausing momentarily to outline some of the key features of *prāṇa* and *vāc* that play a decisive role throughout the rest of the analysis in this and the final chapter. For a start, *vāc* and *prāṇa* are conjoined in a relationship of countervailing potential manifested through bodily expression, whereby breath is latent within speech and speech within breath.²⁵⁶ Unlike the other deities that are most frequently referred to – sight, hearing and mind – speech and breath are not hidden forms whose activities cannot be “seen” in the body of another or felt within oneself, but are both expressed by the body or pressed out of it in forms that can be encountered in the space that is somewhere between within and without. Further to this, the external or disembodied existences of *vāc* and *prāṇa* are positioned aside from the vertical stream of macrocosmic to microcosmic evolutes that populate the body; they exist as

²⁵⁴ The verse cited is RV 1.164.31, not 1.164.13 as Keith indicates (1909: 208). The translation follows Jamison and Brereton 2014: 357 (vol. 1).

²⁵⁵ RV 1.55.8; Jamison and Brereton 2014: 171 (vol 1). The connection between the two verses is provided by the phonological similarity between *āvarīvartti* (intens. *ā-√vrt*), *āvṛta-* (past part. *ā-√vṛ*) and *avatas*. It is noteworthy that the interplay occurs between both verbalized and non-verbalized aspects of the language employed, assuming the audience’s capacity to automatically link the lexical base of *āvarīvartti* to the nominal *āvṛta*, and “hear” the euphonic suggestiveness between *-vṛ-* and *-va-*.

²⁵⁶ AitĀ 3.2.6, ŚāṅkhĀ 4.5. These passages are discussed fully in Chapter 4.

powers or principles in ways that the others do not, and this is evident in the stability of their identities and their ability to match *brahman* in its expansiveness (e.g., AitĀ 1.3.8: “wherever there is *brahman*, there is *vāc*; wherever *vāc*, *brahman*”, *yatra ha kva ca brahma tad vāg yatra vā vāk tad vā brahma*). With respect to these relationships between deities and levels of the cosmos, then, both *vāc* and *prāṇa* themselves embody deeper truths about reality, truths that are only superficially accessible through other forms, entities and substances whose limited identity prevents them from capturing the dynamic spectrum of polarities that build tension and urgency into this worldview.

In addition, some further points about *vāc* bear mentioning. As can be seen in the passage directly above, speech is multi-aspectual and displays semantic and trans-semantic, verbalized and non-verbalized qualities. These include: (1) the patterned cadences of meter, *chandas*, which are amenable to numerical analysis and reconfiguration; (2) sound, as abstracted from semantic content and grammatical structuring alike; and (3) grammatical forms and meta-structures, which may be verbalized or non-verbalized but assumed as present behind spoken forms. All of these aspects of embodied speech are simultaneously aspects of disembodied language; in this way again, personal psycho-physiological boundaries between inside and outside are demonstrated as open, porous, renegotiable, and vulnerable to being penetrated from without by meters, words, phonemes, and so on. As part of the process of knowledge and the mechanics of its generation, the invisible arrangements within language are a blueprint of manifestation, and its externalization through speech is an implicit revelation of those patterned relationships.²⁵⁷ In all these respects, Sanskrit interpenetrates with the body and unveils the circuits of pervasion that underscore human ontology, the cosmos and knowledge alike. And while *prāṇa* is the physiological instrument that re-arranges the person in accordance with epistemological shifts that can only be articulated in Sanskrit, these shifts restructure personhood in ways that recapitulate Sanskrit’s own internal forms.

By establishing embodiment as the central context of revelation, the Ṛgvedic Āraṇyakas bring our interpretation of Sanskrit and the person to a

²⁵⁷ See Larson 1974: 47; Padoux 1990: 4.

confluence between subjectivity and language. To the extent that immortality, although realized after death, is presented as an outcome that preserves epistemological shifts that occur during the temporal narrative of a person's life, it is ostensible that these significant transformations would have dynamic repercussions before death, investing the person with power that makes use of their adaptations to knowledge. We are then brought immediately to the question of the *living* person's relationship to revelation – of how it is expressed, of the ends to which it is employed, and of what this says about empowerment.

This implicates two potentially conflicting modes of subjectivity, both inseparable from the ontological, revelatory power of Sanskrit – *pace* knowledge – to assertively disclose, and simultaneously to create what it discloses²⁵⁸: one in which the ultimacy of a person's identity is realized after death and with respect to a purely transcendent absolute in the *videhamukti* or “disembodied” mode of liberation that later became formalized in *bhakti* traditions and was contiguous with a distancing from extraordinary attainments achieved during life; and another in which the ultimacy of a person's identity becomes manifest during life and is legitimately expressed through extraordinary attainments (eventually encoded in *jīvanmukti* traditions that postulated “living liberation” and is closely related to yogic and tantric praxis) and the pursuit of immortality in life. The fact that the two appear side-by-side in the mid-Vedic texts leads White to observe of *brahman* in the Upaniṣads that “this absolute ground is simultaneously the universal *container* of all that exists and that which is *contained* in all that has life....These representations of the absolute give rise to two different and incompatible soteriologies, the one immanentist and the other gradualist.”²⁵⁹ While the contrastive practices that drive this conflict have traceable Vedic roots, and differing opinions about whether extraordinary powers should rightfully be engaged in appear as early as the Upaniṣads, the Buddhist Pali texts and the canonical scriptures of the Jains,²⁶⁰ the formalization of this conflict through an argument about “the meaning of religion” that reflects “profound disagreement

²⁵⁸ Deutsch 1985: 117, 124-25.

²⁵⁹ White 2009: 84.

²⁶⁰ Cabezon 2008, Clough 2012, and Silk 2003 provide a representative sample of scholarship on extraordinary powers in different aspects of Buddhism. Wiley 2012 and Dundas 1998 are informative sources on such powers in Jainism.

about the very nature of God...and whether men could legitimately aspire to be gods”²⁶¹ significantly postdates the Ṛgvedic Āraṇyakas. And while this observation might seem so basic as to serve no purpose here, I point out that the same cultural influences that had a role in informing the medieval *bhaktas*’ invocation of a categorical division between magic and miracle are remarkably similar to, if not in fact of common heritage with, the underlying influence of biblical religion that was once active within the scholarly distaste for the “magical” practices of other cultures and has carried over into a scientifically reasonable approach to literary criticism.²⁶² It was discussed at length in the previous chapter how the perception of categorical oppositions have played out in the study and definition of the Āraṇyakas, and even prevented scholars from seeing the patterns of continuity that a polythetic approach can bring to the surface. Unlike this long and vociferous list of Indic and academic pundits, the Ṛgvedic Āraṇyakas show no such qualms about including discussion of rites, amulets, visions, *mantras* and other typically magical phenomena alongside the exposition of solemn rituals and deliberations on the true identity of the person or self. Subjectivity in the Āraṇyakas extends from the living expression of one’s spiritual attainment through extraordinary powers, to the fully transformative realization of knowledge in immortality after death.²⁶³

Next, to the extent that the temporal framing of accounts such as ŚāṅkhĀ 4.14 draws the Veda, as an open-ended matrix of knowledge production, into the physical space of the life-world, the patterns of tradition gain present relevance at the intersection between past events and future goals. Thus, the knowledge encoded within the Veda, which is interiorized through a structural co-ordination between person and text that redefines subjectivity, guides self-expression (or

²⁶¹ Pinch 2006: 195.

²⁶² For an extensive examination of the category “magic” with respect to the study of *mantra* through “flawed terms and categories” see Burchett 2008. For the influence of monotheistic worldviews on the development of traditions of *bhakti*, as introduced via the Sufis, see Burchett 2012.

²⁶³ Compare Olivelle’s notes on the early Upaniṣads (1998: 27): “Many scholars ignore these and similar passages in their search for the “philosophy” or “the fundamental conception” of the Upaniṣads. But are we justified in doing so? If the compilers of the Upaniṣads thought them significant enough to be included in these collections, who are we to reject them? These passages, I believe, are as important to uncovering the religious history of the period as the passages proclaiming the oneness of Ātman and Brahman.”

assertion) into a loop which discloses the person as a “receptive replicator of the cosmos.”²⁶⁴ Yet this knowledge is never only geared toward self-realization. In the Āraṇyakas as in the Saṃhitās, knowledge expressed through Sanskrit is deployed to artfully manipulate the universe and the gods, via the richly condensed medium of ritual, in ways that rebound through the worlds and have a reverberating effect on humans and their quality of life. This pragmatic and performative process, which is widely accepted as a cornerstone of the sacrificial ritual performed by the *ṛṣis*, appears in the Ṛgvedic Āraṇyakas but has tended to be read in terms of a commentarial-style explanation designed to establish the relevance between the verses used in ritual and the purpose to which a ritual is performed, or as evidence of the increasing irrelevance of *yajña* in mid-Vedic culture.²⁶⁵

While it is of course possible that the claims made in the Āraṇyakas do serve this explanatory function, the person’s propensity towards flexible adaptation and the active role of structural change in defining soteriological attainment suggest that there is more at stake: as existence claims, these explanations are suggestive of the mechanics involved in revelation – knowledge as a process, as Smith aptly points out²⁶⁶ – and attest to an interdimensional adherence or conjoining between one who knows and what is revealed through Sanskrit in both its semantic and trans-semantic aspects. This is illuminated in the opening paragraphs of AitĀ (1.1.1-2), where the matter of which recitation should accompany the commencement of the Mahāvratā is addressed. The text proceeds by moving from one possible recitation to the next, citing five different Ṛgvedic verses to Agni (in order of appearance: ṚV 3.13, 8.74, 5.1, 2.5, and 7.1), all of which summon the god in his special identification with the *hotṛ* priest and invoke his powers as seer and poet, and by drawing correspondences between the thematic content of the hymns and the various outcomes that may be desired from the Mahāvratā: prosperity (*rāddhikāmaḥ*), increase (*puṣṭikāmaḥ*), glory (*kīrtikāmaḥ*), children and cattle (*prajāpaśukāmaḥ*), and good food or the securing of it (*annādyakāmaḥ*). Further correspondences are made between the metres in

²⁶⁴ F. Smith 2006a: 374.

²⁶⁵ For example, see Lubin (2010: 4-5) on the Brāhmaṇas as a mode of commentary.

²⁶⁶ F. Smith 2006a: 178.

which the verses are composed, such as in the identification of the *anuṣṭubh* and *gāyatrī* of ṚV 8.74 with *brahman* and *vāc* respectively; the truth-claims contained within the lexicon of the hymns and their effect within the Mahāvratā, for example, in the play on the verbal form *janayanti*, “they bring to birth,” in ṚV 7.1.1b (AitĀ 1.1.2: *jātavad etasmād vā ahno yajamāno jāyate tasmāj jātavat*, “it contains the word “birth” and the sacrificer is born from this day, thus it contains the word “birth””); and even the number of lines to a verse, verses in a hymn, and repetitions within the recitation. The rest of the paragraphs in AitĀ 1.1 continue in much the same way, with the addition of the often-repeated assertion that “[X is attained by] one who knows thus or by one for whom a *hotṛ* who possesses this knowledge recites” (*ya evaṃ veda yeṣāṃ caivaṃ vidvān etad dhotā śaṃsati*).

If a case were to be made for a continuity between pure or orthodox instances of revelation and the utilization of this knowledge – as selfish magic – in the service of worldly ends that increase individual power and status, it lies in the efficacy of *vāc* to work changes in the person that bring them into a deeper state of integrated connection with the world around them, the cosmos at large, *idaṃ sarvam*. The Āraṇyakas’ claims bear a relevance and energetic urgency that center directly on the power of the verses to work through and for the person, harnessing the subtle but true relationships that weave through the cosmos and bringing them into contiguous manifestation in the life-world, in tangible forms that promote life and assert the transformations undergone in the subjectivity of the ritual actor. There is no reason to presume that the qualities of language involved in the revelation and manifestation of truth and true identity are categorically discreet from those that serve ends oriented toward the well-being of the individual, such as fame, illustriousness and repute; moreover, language in both instances is equally bound to *prāṇa* and the true (*satya*), while the valued or desirable attributes it can instigate within personhood are legitimated by their functional testimony to high levels of spiritual attainment. Just as revelatory knowledge takes hold within the person, restructuring them in ways that are suited to the transcendent and ultimately soteriological goal of immortality, the semantic and trans-semantic structures embodying this knowledge exist in relationship to everything that can be objectified in the life-world, allowing it to

be restructured in ways that are equally specified by the Vedic texts and which preserve the person and their attainments up to the time of death. And while it cannot be said that the latter practices are formally soteriological, in the sense of directly constituting the transformations required for self-transcendence, their power must nonetheless be explained through reference to the same fluidity of embodiment and disembodiment on which the attainment of immortality itself hangs.

Let us turn now to a final example, AitĀ 2.3.6, where it appears that language serves a dual-end – one pertaining to the changes required for post-mortem immortality and the perfected completion of realization, the other to the preservation and authoritative expression of those changes during live embodiment – rather than two divergent and contradictory goals. As we have seen repeatedly with respect to the reconfiguration of the deities in the body, transformations to the person occur in text-specific ways; and this is no less true in cases where it is the subjectivity of the person, the yard-stick of the very individuality that is supposedly attenuated through absorption into a universal identity, that “becomes greater” (*bhūyān bhavati*). This is not explicated by the texts; however, it is apparent that there are certain trigger-points within language – which Shulman refers to as “sites of ultimacy, where truth resides”²⁶⁷ – that are sunk deep within the shifting, recombinant and nested aspects of *vāc*. This division between what is true (*satyam*) and untrue (*anṛtam*), going against the grain of *ṛta*, encapsulates the fundamental efficacy of language, but with a caveat that this passage strikingly highlights: these triggers not only elude easy classification, but contain within themselves a threat of inversion, such that the same true speech that makes a man a lord can drain him, the same untrue speech that dries a man out fills the self but destroys him.

*sa vā eṣa vācaḥ paramo vikāro yad etan mahadukthaṃ tad etat
pañcavidhaṃ mitaṃ amitaṃ svarāḥ satyānṛte iti / ṛg gāthā kumbyā tan
mitaṃ yajur nigado vṛthāvāk tad amitaṃ sāmātho yaḥ kaś ca geṣṇaḥ saḥ
svara om³ iti satyaṃ nety anṛtam / tad etat puṣpaṃ phalaṃ vāco yat satyaṃ
sa heśvaro yaśasvī kalyāṇakīrtir bhavitoḥ puṣpaṃ hi phalaṃ vācaḥ satyaṃ
vadati / athaitan mūlaṃ vāco yad anṛtaṃ tad yathā vṛkṣa āvirmūlaḥ suṣyati*

²⁶⁷ Shulman 2012: 128.

*sa udvartata evam evānṛtaṃ vadann āvirmūlam ātmanaṃ karoti sa suṣyati
sa udvartate / tasmād anṛtaṃ na vaded dayeta tv enena / parāg vā etad
riktaṃ akṣaraṃ yad etad om³ iti tad yat kiñcom ity āhātraivāsmāi tad
ricyate sa yat sarvaṃ om kuryād riñcyād ātmānaṃ sa kāmebhyo nālaṃ
syāt / athaitat pūrṇam abhyātmaṃ yan neti / sa yat sarvaṃ neti brūyāt
pāpikāsyā kīrtir jāyeta sainaṃ tatraiva hanyāt / tasmāt kāla eva dadyāt
kale na dadyāt tat satyānṛte mithunīkaroti tayor mithunāt prajāyate bhūyān
bhavati / yo vai tāṃ vācaṃ veda yasyā eṣa vikāraḥ sa saṃprativit / ākāro
vai sarvā vāk saiṣā sparśoṣmabhir vyajyamānā bahvī nānā rūpā bhavati /
tasyai yad upaṃśu sa prāṇo 'tha yad uccais tac charīraṃ tasmāt tat tira
iva tira iva hy aśarīram aśarīro hi prāṇo 'tha yad uccais tac charīraṃ
tasmāt tad āvir āvir hi śarīram // AitĀ 2.3.6*

The Mahaduktha is the highest transformation of *vāc*. It is fivefold: measured, unmeasured, sound, true, and untrue. The *ṛc*, the verse used in legends (*gāthā*), and precepts recorded in verse (*kumbyā*) are measured; the *yajus*, the audible invocation (*nigada*), and casual talk (*vṛthāvāc*) are unmeasured; the *sāman* or one of its songs is sound; *om* is true; and “no” is untrue. What is true is the flower and fruit of *vāc*. One can become a lord, famous and with excellent reputation, for they speak the true, the flower and fruit of *vāc*. Untruth is the lowest part of *vāc*. Just as a tree with its roots exposed dries up and perishes, so a man, speaking untruth, exposes his roots: he dries up, he perishes. Therefore, let a man not speak untruth but distance himself from it. *Om* is an empty syllable and goes forward, so when a man says *om* it is emptied out of him; if he were to [say] *om* to all things, he would empty himself – there would not be enough (left of him) for pleasures. Now, “no” is full for one’s self. If a man were to say “no” to everything, his fame would be born evil, and he would destroy himself. On account of this, one should give at the proper time and not give at the proper time – thus does one unite the true and untrue; and from their union he is brought forth, he becomes greater. The one who knows *vāc*, of which the [Mahaduktha] is a transformation, is wise. [The phoneme] *a* is all of *vāc* – being manifested through the mutes and sibilants, [*vāc*] becomes abundant and manifold. When, for [*vāc*], one whispers, that is *prāṇa*; when spoken aloud, that is the body. Therefore it moves beyond secretly, for the incorporeal moves beyond and *prāṇa* is incorporeal. Yet, aloud it is the body; and therefore it is apparent, for the body is apparent.

Set against the backdrop of the soteriological impetus to preserve the epistemological shifts that have taken root within one’s body as a prerequisite to the person’s actualization of immortality in the afterlife, the dangers encoded within even this “highest transformation” or modification of *vāc* acquire a profound sense of existential urgency.

As in the creation narratives with which this examination of embodiment commenced, it is evident that the force of language gains its fullest coherence in light of a vision of personhood particularized by its openness, multiplicity, and extension to disembodied yet animate and affective forms whose relevance depends on their contingent juxtaposition against the temporal limitations imposed by a body that decays. What these passages reveal is that personal agency is codified and legitimated as enactive knowledge within the texts' vision of soteriological practice. Spiritual attainment (being "wise," *samprativit*) applies in the context of an unfolding awareness that sees reality through the lens of *vāc* and meets it with countervailing personal force by internally integrating these trigger-points within one's conduct. And in this way, once again, the circuit of pervasion between various entities and beings of different substantiality is made complete: the control of language is the control of oneself, and what this intends is the perfect crafting into wholeness (*sam-√kr*) of one's embodiment after the intricately balanced interior structures of *Samhitā*. Sanskrit is not transcendently aloof from the lived experiences that carve out the person – it is the knife that does the carving.

CHAPTER FOUR

Parsing Śruti

*vān me manasi pratiṣṭhitā mano me vāci pratiṣṭhitam āvir āvir
ma edhi vedasya ma āṇī sthaḥ śrutam me mā prahāsīr
anenādhītenāhorātrān saṃdadhāmy ṛtam vadiṣyāmi satyam
vadiṣyāmi tan mām avatu tad vaktāram avatv avatu mām avatu
vaktāram avatu vaktāram //*

My speech is established in mind, my mind established in
speech –
may you be visible, visible to me.
For me you are the two axle-pins of the Veda.
May the sacred knowledge not desert me –
with this attained, I join night and day.
I will speak the real; I will speak the true –
may it protect me, may it protect the teacher,
may it protect me, may it protect the teacher,
may it protect the teacher.

AITAREYA ĀRAṆYAKA 2.7

Grammatical Realities and the Generation of Truth

It is ironic, although not altogether surprising, that one of the largest difficulties faced by modern scholars of Vedic texts and religion comes in the smallest of linguistic packages. This is the *bandhu* (“bond”), described by Frederick Smith as a “linkage of one phenomenon, entity, being, notion, or concept with another, based on phonological similarities, numerological equivalences, or other formal principles”²⁶⁸ that is typically generated at a syntactic level through the utilization of simple nominal apposition with or without the emphatic particle *vai* (“X *vai* Y”). Take, for example, the opening sequence of AitĀ 1.3.8:

*tā nadena viharati / prāṇo vai nadas tasmāt prāṇo nadan sarvaḥ saṃnadati
/ nadaṃ va odatīnām itīm³ uṣṇig akṣarair bhavaty anuṣṭup pādair āyur vā*

²⁶⁸ F. Smith 2006a: 211.

*uṣṇig vāg anuṣṭub / tad asminn āyus ca vācam ca dadhāti / tās triḥ
prathamayā pañcaviṃśatir bhavanti pañcaviṃśa ātmā pañcaviṃśaḥ
prajāpatir daśa hastyā aṅgulo daśa pādyaḥ dvā ūrū dvau bāhū ātmaiva
pañcaviṃśas tam imam ātmānaṃ pañcaviṃśaṃ saṃskurute / atho
pañcaviṃśaṃ vā etad ahaḥ pañcaviṃśa etasyāhnū stomaḥ tat samena
samaṃ pratipadyate tasmād dve²⁶⁹ eva pañcaviṃśatir bhavanti /*

[He] intersperses [the verses of the recitation] with the “roaring bull” (*nada*; = RV 8.69.2). Now, *prāṇa* is the roarer, which is why every breath, roaring (*nadan*), sounds out aloud (*sam-√nad*). The verse “[you take aim] at the roaring bull among your moist females”²⁷⁰ is an *uṣṇih* by its syllables and an *anuṣṭub* by its feet – the *uṣṇih* is life, the *anuṣṭub* speech (*vāc*). Thus he places life and speech in this [offering]. With the first repeated three times, the verses come up to twenty-five; the body (*ātman*) consists of twenty-five and Prajāpati consists of twenty-five: the ten digits of the hands, the ten of the feet, two legs, two arms, and the core (*ātman*) are twenty-five. He completes (*sam-√kr*) that, this body consisting of twenty-five. Further, this day is twenty-five (*pañcaviṃśa*) and the *stoma* of this day is the Pañcaviṃśa – identity is recovered through identity; thus they both become twenty-five.

This condensed image of relationships spreading back and forth between revelation and embodied identity displays the expansive potential of *bandhus* to make multiple and simultaneous reference to a diverse array of phenomena and objects. Moreover, this linguistic operation activates the claim that “identity is recovered through identity” (*samena samaṃ pratipadyate*).

Bandhus constitute the predominant compositional feature of the R̥gvedic Āraṇyakas with the bulk of the ritual exegesis of the Mahāvratā and its recitations conforming to the “X vai Y” structure seen above and sharing an epistemological affinity with the statements of true identity (“one should know that they are the hymn”) that guide the cosmological narratives examined in the previous chapter.²⁷¹ The fact that *bandhus* thus locate these materials within the broader setting of a pan-Indic practical concern with homologization and the discerning of invisible connections – a concern with a pedigree extending some three and a half

²⁶⁹ For this peculiarity of Vedic *sandhi*, see Macdonell 1910: 66.

²⁷⁰ Translation by Jamison and Brereton 2014: 1161 (vol. 2); according to their reading, the subject of RV 8.69.2 is the hymn itself.

²⁷¹ B. Smith 1998: 30-31. The affinity of the *bandhus* or *sampads* in the Brāhmaṇas with the *mahāvākyas* of the Upaniṣads has not done much to raise the status of the former collection of texts; this may in part be to do with Śāṅkara’s assertion that *sampads* are not true so much as imaginary connections. See Shulman 2012: 128.

thousand years, from the *R̥gveda Saṃhitā* to modern tantric practices of *nyāsa*,²⁷² and resonating with epistemological strategies and referential frameworks employed from Buddhism to Āyurveda to the Tamil poetic tradition – has done little to elucidate their contribution to the Āraṇyakas as revelation. This needs to be noted because, while the extreme syntactic brevity of *bandhus* does not belie their metaphysical depth, their lack of expository detail has left scholars in conflicting opinion over how these linkages should be understood and agreement reached through recourse to their language, with recent scholarship falling into two modes of approach, roughly speaking: firstly, those that align the hierarchies insinuated by *bandhus* with priest-led ritual and a sociolinguistic vision of Sanskrit, and who argue, with Brian K. Smith,²⁷³ for an intellectual coherence grounded in the *varṇa* system; and secondly, those that look beyond Sanskrit specifically to language generally and its intersection with a “mental economy” of religious practice and perception, as in Laurie Patton’s analysis of *bandhu* through the dual lens of metonymic association and performance. Thus, while one approach tells us a lot about critical interpretations of Sanskrit but little about language as such, the other tells us a lot about language and ritual but little about the Sanskrit language in particular.

In addition to these, a third approach to *bandhus* may be noted, which comprises of a handful of side-notes and suggestions made by scholars working with Vedic antecedents of Tantra and related practices; this approach thus remains somewhat in potential. This matter aside, it would include such observations as Sylvain Lévi’s that the ritual practices depicted in the Brāhmaṇas paved the way to the “pious obscenities” of Tantra; Frederick Smith’s identification of *bandhu* as closely related to possession and transfers of essence; David White’s perception of the linkages contained in *bandhu* as one conceptual forerunner to the transacting of fluids so central to early *yoginī* cults; and,

²⁷² Lipner 1994: 34-35.

²⁷³ Note the following statement by B. Smith (1994: 323): “Classifications, such as those made possible by the *varṇa* system, reflect the interests of those who are classifying. And those who do the classifying for a particular culture and time do so because they can, because they have seized...the ability to imperiously decree what is what.” This might be compared with Patton’s (2005: 81) statement that there is far more to *bandhu* “than the reenactment and the speech act. There is metonymic connection between word and action – the mantra’s power to refer, to identify, to create a world – and that too is part of *bandhu*.”

similarly, André Padoux’s identification of *Vāc* with Shakti and subsequent suggestion that the dynamics of *dīkṣā* and *shaktipat* echo *vāc*’s ability to not only move between realms but bind them.²⁷⁴ Again, however, this latter approach does not attend specifically to either *bandhus* or to Sanskrit.

Assuming for a moment that it is viable to suggest that *bandhus* reflect or are even constrained by Sanskrit in its linguistic and soteriological particularities, and that this would intersect determinatively with the human subject and their identity (both as self-apprehended and textually prescribed) then it is of interest to note that each of the approaches just mentioned marks a response to the nineteenth-century flowering of Vedic Studies and its beleaguering by the high reactivity of early translators to what they perceived as “magic,” as defined by an irrational belief in the power of words to serve manipulative selfish ends rather than the supplicative ones of prayer – or, as Whitney would state, what we have here is “one of the aberrations of the human mind.”²⁷⁵ Evidently, the repudiation of the magic allegation – the argument that these ritual materials are not irrational and *bandhus* not the work of delusional ritualists, the attempt to locate logically consistent explanations for obscure references and directions, and the effort to produce unabridged (and uncensored) editions of Vedic texts²⁷⁶ – has not, in the majority of cases, meant a corresponding return to a positive evaluation of the power of words, for, as Burchett states in a study of *mantra*: “The problem is that “magic” and “magical” are loaded terms; as soon as they are used to label any given phenomenon, a value judgment is made.”²⁷⁷ And again: “That which we call magical, by any other name would be just as irrational. In a sense, to think otherwise would be to grant language the very magical power that modern rationality has long refused it.”²⁷⁸ It seems suffice to say that while there is a space within the contemporary discipline of Indology for *bandhus* and their relationship to the deeply internal dynamics of *vāc*, it is obscured beneath a cross-

²⁷⁴ Lévi 1966 [1898]; F. Smith 2006a; White 2003; Padoux 1990, cf. Larson 1974: 47. See also Burchett’s (2008:822) critique of White’s identification of *mantra* with the transaction of bodily fluids, stating: “To understand the context of Tantric *mantra* it is essential to understand the concept of *vāc*.”

²⁷⁵ Whitney 1882: 392-93; also Tull 1991.

²⁷⁶ For example, see Doniger O’Flaherty 1985: 6-9; Jamison 1991: 36-39, 1996: 253.

²⁷⁷ Burchett 2008: 834.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*: 835.

hatching of our more culturally immediate, ingrained concerns about what constitutes acceptable scholarly practice.

Yet following this, it is even more interesting to observe that magic might be the very description that provides a promising point of departure for the present study. According the employment of the term in La Porta and Shulman's volume *The Poetics of Grammar*, it appears feasible that "magic" can be used neutrally to describe the causal power of language to effect reality *not* through a word's coercion of its referent, but from within the generative ability of grammar to create and manifest. The distinction made here, between grammar on one hand and the relation between a word and its referent on the other, marks a crucial shift in the underlying terms of how we understand the power of language, its magic. This is because, firstly, in an intellectual climate that holds a mainstream view of language as inert and even as arbitrary in respect to the construction of meaning, attention paid to words forces the discussion of magic into an analysis of representation. The scholarly disavowal of their power "configures a sharp and impermeable boundary between nature and culture, a natural world subject to nonhuman causality and the artificial, transitory world of human language."²⁷⁹ Secondly, this treatment of words, those seemingly bounded objects floating on the surface of language, constrains discussion to verbal structures and, indeed, to what is effable. By contrast, grammar suggests a multiplicity of dynamic processes; these implicate the veridical nature of interrelationship or linkage as they unfold inclusively from silence to sound to metrics, phonemes, derivations, words, sentences and entire lengths of composition. "Grammar," report La Porta and Shulman, "though selective, presents a methodology much more textured and elastic than other conceptual models. It is, for one thing, capable of containing both the semantic and trans-semantic pieces of reality. It retains the contours of cultural expressivity, and allows for structured transitions between disparate domains."²⁸⁰ Thus, what is magical about grammar is its intense creativity and inclusiveness, its promise that a matrix of numerable rules is in fact an infinitude of potential expression, and not the fixed structures that have preoccupied

²⁷⁹ Styers 2004: 221; cf. Foucault 1970: 43; Skorupski 1976: 159; Harpham 2002: 235-36.

²⁸⁰ La Porta and Shulman 2007: 6.

linguists and modern philosophers.²⁸¹ This brings La Porta and Shulman to the conclusion that:

It is thus no accident that in culture after culture, grammar turns out to be dependably linked with creation and restoration. Knowledge of grammar allows access to the workings of reality, which the skilled grammarian is capable of using effectively – to bless or to curse, to kill or to heal, to make present or to transform. In this sense, grammar transcends the merely descriptive or referential analysis of linguistic systems. Such systems are perceived as subsets of a far more comprehensive poetics. The world itself is grammar-ed, though not necessarily in transparent ways.²⁸²

The strength of the postulations forwarded by La Porta and Shulman lies in their amenability to being adapted to whatever moment in the history of a given language or culture is under investigation such that the emic or internal gravitas of grammar's creativity is preserved; three of them are of particular consequence for the examination conducted in this chapter and merit further contextualization with reference to the Sanskrit of the Āraṇyakas. These are: (1) that grammar retains the contours of cultural expressivity; (2) the world itself is grammar-ed, though not necessarily in transparent ways; and (3) grammar allows for structured transitions between disparate domains.

With respect to the first postulation, what we know of the historical framing of the Āraṇyakas indicates that while the six Vedic auxiliary disciplines (*vedāṅga*) developed recognizable shape during the middle Vedic period, and that four of these have a sharply linguistic orientation (i.e., phonology, *śikṣā*; morphology, *vyākaraṇa*; etymology, *nirukta*; and metrics, *chandas*), the period dealt with here is prior to the formation of grammar as “a fully autonomous discipline of linguistic study and analytical speculation,” that is, of *Vyākaraṇa*, a system sufficiently distinct from poetics, *Alaṅkāraśāstra*, for their later proponents to debate the matter of which was the superior authority on

²⁸¹ I point the reader to Shulman's study of the intersection between grammar and poetry in southern Indian visions of the creation of the Tamil and Telugu languages (2001b), and make note of his observation that “Grammar, in this case, is the condition of self-transcendence, the presence of a generative set of formative limits that allow, or even positively require, the informed poet to break through his own former constraints” (ibid.: 370).

²⁸² La Porta and Shulman 2007: 6.

language.²⁸³ Thus, the metaphysical grammar that is internally conceived by the Āraṇyakas (which, might be noted, display no explicit concern for the *vedāṅgas*) cleaves strongly, though silently, to the Veda and its recitation, even while demonstrating the numerous linguistic differences to be expected of middle Vedic language. Further, the embedding of *ṛcs* within the surrounding text extends the cultural expressivity of the Āraṇyakas from *bandhus* and related forms of linkage, including *upanīṣad*, to the entwining of poetic and grammatical knowledge that is implicit in hymn-composition and is a requisite both of Vedic revelation and, as we shall see, of the Āraṇyakas' expression of self-transformation.

To this may be added the observation that grammar is generated as a subtle evolute of *vāc*, as opposed to *vāc* being the outcome of grammatical processes. The stirring promise of an immanent emergence of sound precedes grammar, which in turn precedes spoken language in a familiar movement through identity from utter expansiveness to delimited form. This vision of grammar not only resonates across its cultural expression in the Āraṇyakas, but pertains equally to the second postulation, that the world is grammar-ed: *vāc*, the Āraṇyakas insist, is co-extensive with *brahman*, and *brahman* co-extensive with *vāc* (AitĀ 1.3.8²⁸⁴). It would be a mistake to assume that this necessarily implies either a strict identification of the two – that *brahman* is *vāc* – or their duality as cosmic absolutes;²⁸⁵ indeed, the evidence of the R̥gvedic Āraṇyakas rather suggests that *vāc* extends as far as does *brahman* because of its capacity to yield a full spectrum of manifest forms that are as unarguably differentiated as they are fundamentally linked by unseen, or unheard, connections. Since all of this is axiomatically identified with *brahman*, grammar principally describes manifestation and the entrenched dynamics of realizing the truth of self-identification: “*Brahman* is [expressed as] *a*, and the “I” (*aham*) contained therein” (*a iti brahma tatrāgatam aham iti*; AitĀ 2.3.8). As this passage continues, the assonance of the vowel-sound *a* provides the basis of a

²⁸³ Shulman 2001b: 371.

²⁸⁴ The AitĀ here cites R̥V 10.114.8, and then gives the paraphrase: *yatra ha kva ca brahma tad vāg yatra vā vāk tad vā brahmety etad uktaṃ bhavati* / Jamison and Brereton observe that “we can see in this contrast the inherent message of the hymn, that insight and its verbal product, poetry, have the power to give shape and multiplicity to the perceptible world” (2014: 1158 [vol. 3]).

²⁸⁵ See Padoux’ (1990: 8) description of the evolution of the relationship between *vāc* and *brahman*.

multilayered grammatical mapping that exposes florid linkages between the ritual domain with its focus on the syllabic dimensions (*akṣara*) of recitation, human life-expectancy (*āyur*) and its encoding in light of days (*ahar*) in the world, the acquisition (*āpnoti*) of transformative knowledge, the five senses as vital expressions of life and their establishment of the immediate context for soteriological realization (*anakāmamāro 'tha devaratha*), and the culmination of all hidden connections – their enactment – in the archetypal revelation (*ā...*) of the *Ṛgveda*:

a iti brahma tatrāgatam aham iti / 1 / tad vā idaṃ bṛhatīśahasraṃ saṃpannaṃ tasya vā etasya bṛhatīśahasrasya saṃpannasya ṣaṭtriṃśatam akṣarāṇāṃ sahasrāṇi bhavanti tāvanti puruṣāyūṣo 'hnāṃ sahasrāṇi bhavanti / 2 / jīvākṣareṇaiva jīvāhar āpnoti jīvāhnā jīvākṣaram iti / 3 / anakāmamāro 'tha devarathas tasya vāg uddhiḥ śrotre pakṣasī cakṣuṣī yukte manaḥ saṃgrahītā tad ayaṃ prāṇo 'dhitiṣṭhati / 4 / tad uktam ṛṣinā / ā tena yātaṃ manaso javīyasā nimīśaś cij javīyaseti javīyaseti // 5 // AitĀ 2.3.8²⁸⁶

Brahman is [expressed as] *a* and the “I” contained therein. This is brought forth as a thousand *bṛhatīs*; and of these thousand *bṛhatīs* brought forth there are thirty-six thousand syllables – so many are the thousands of days of a person’s life. By a single syllable of life one attains a day of life; by a day of life, a syllable of life. There is a chariot of gods that destroys the undesired; its seat is speech, sides the ears, yoked horses the eyes, driver the mind – this *prāṇa* stands upon it. This was said by a *ṛṣi*: “Approach with that, swifter than the mind, swifter, swifter even than the blinking of an eye.”²⁸⁷

It does not take an exhaustive analysis of the above passage for it to be evident that the recurrence of the phoneme *a* facilitates the grammatical and poetic movement across this interlocking set of ideas. What needs to be noted in addition, however, is the fact that this grounding in the phoneme *a* generates a stylistic deep structure that literally – viz. truthfully – figures or constitutes the revelatory claim in ways that are lost through translation. It is likely, I suggest,

²⁸⁶ Numbers added. I take this passage to consist of five and not six lines; the formulaic *tad uktam ṛṣinā* is properly read with the *ṚV* references that follow rather than as a particular contribution to the structure of the text.

²⁸⁷ The first half of the citation (up to “mind”) is from *ṚV* 10.39.12; the second half from *ṚV* 8.73.2. I translate these lines in accordance with their appearance in the *AitĀ* and not as they appear in the grammatical and thematic context of the original *sūktas* of the *ṚV*.

that this is a result of the inability of English grammar to capture the non-verbal claims that are made in the Sanskrit grammar; and it is the loss of this grammatical coherence, more than anything intrinsic to the emic perspective of the Āraṇyakas, that creates the impression of a loose sequence of phenomena being forced into relationships that cannot withstand modern scientific analysis.²⁸⁸

For this reason, it is worthwhile pausing to take a closer look at the phonetic and grammatical figures that constitute the stylistic claims of the above passage. We have already seen that the first and final lines are simplistically linked by the non-semantic repetition *a iti... ā tena...* in which the pairing of vowel quantities (*a : ā*) forms an icon of the connection between statements. Furthermore, however, this iconic function suggests that the passage should be read not as a linear progression from assertion to justification to authority claim, but as a strikingly comprehensive instance of poetic composition in which the first and final lines are conceived of as equivalent, and the central line (*jīvākṣareṇa...*) is thematically related to both, as indicated by the reappearance of the marker *iti*. This points to a recursively embedded, even spiraling network of relationships that commences in the very first line in the form of the anagrammatic identity of *brahma* and *aham*,

a iti brAHMA tatrāgatam AHAM iti

which appears in combination with a transition from *a* to *ā* that is indexed by the possible double reading of “entered/come there” (*tatra:āgatam*) and “in this respect gone to *ā*” (*tatra:ā-gatam*). As a grammatical figure, *iti* and *gatam* disclose themselves in relationship (they are otherwise unrelated forms) by performing a comparable bracketing function; and, building upon this, they highlight the further equivalences (1) in metaphysical identity between *brahma* and *aham*, and (2) in revelatory disclosure through *a* and *ā*, and by extension through Āraṇyaka and Saṃhitā alike.

a iti brahma...āgatam aham

a iti brahma...āgatam aham

²⁸⁸ For an example of a contrasting perspective on *bandhu*, see Witzel 1996:3.

From the perspective of the phonetic figure, the switching *iti...gatam...iti* generates a sonic icon that firstly frames the entire existence claim through the mirroring *a iti ... aham iti*, and secondly utilizes the sharp effect of the interjected repetition *-tam...-ham* to sonically isolate the first person pronoun *aham*. This places unique emphasis on the relationship between personal identity and self-realization; moreover, the neuter declension in *-am* provides the inversion of *-ma* that is required for the anagrammatic transition from *AHMA* to *AHAM*.

a iti brAHMA tatrāgatAM AHAM iti

The overall effect is of an unfolding of identity that can be found in the always-present, but not immediately apparent, subtleties of language.

A set of related figures occurs in the final line of the passage, which consists of a pair of short extracts from two R̥gvedic *sūktas*, R̥V 10.39.12 and R̥V 8.73.2, which Jamison and Brereton translate respectively as “drive here with your chariot swifter than thought” and “drive here with your chariot quicker even than a wink.”²⁸⁹ I have already stated that the overall compositional structure of this passage, AitĀ 2.3.8, suggests that the first and final lines are positioned as equivalents and poetically indexed by the common bracketing of both lines by the initial position *a/ā* and occurrence of *iti*, where *iti* serves to direct emphasis within the line and also to highlight the line as a whole within the surrounding text. In addition may be cited the phonetic equivalence of *āgatam* and *ā-yātam*, which binds lines 1 and 5 together in the structure of a ring composition where the recurrence of *ā* establishes the ring and the contrastive shift between the grammatically unrelated items modified (*-gatam* is a past participle, and *-yātam* a second person dual verb in the imperative mood) exposes the concern of the speaker and soteriological import of the passage, namely, the inception of a transformation in identity that enacts the archetypal relationship of *brahman* and the person (viz. *aham*). Again, this is implicitly reinforced by the occurrence of *āpnoti* in the middle position of the central line, which provides the only other instance of a verb or verbal derivative modified by *ā* and elucidates the necessity

²⁸⁹ Jamison and Brereton 2014: 1438-1441 (vol.3) and 1168-1169 (vol.1).

of attaining ($\sqrt{\bar{a}p}$) the state described in the first line by means, presumably, of such transformative awareness as is culturally expressed (and doubly codified) in the relationship between *ṛṣi* (seer) and revelation embodied in line 5.

The same transition between states is heightened thematically by the dedication of the *R̥gvedic* verses cited in line 5 to the *Aśvin* twins (a pair of Vedic deities), the hymns to whom are typically characterized by the poetic attention paid to their significance as “dual divinities that can extend between opposites” and “who facilitate movement between spheres: between childlessness and birth, death and life, old age and youth, non-marriage and marriage, and so forth.”²⁹⁰ In this connection, the famed speed and mobility of the *Aśvins*’ chariot – essential to their characterization as gods who “rescue people from various dangers and difficulties in various places and circumstances”²⁹¹ – and its central role in their facilitation of the transition between ontological and soteriological states, is mapped over the emic religious gravitas of chariots, firstly, as a mode of transportation to the world of the gods and identified with the *yajña* itself in the early Vedic period, and secondly as an image of the relationship between the body and the senses that is well-established by the time of the *Āraṇyakas* and *Upaniṣads* and is described in the fourth line of the passage.²⁹² More significantly for our current purpose, however, is the fact that these thematic connections are not only articulated in the deep structure of line 5, but that it is precisely through the stylistic and structural aspects of this articulation that a much fuller disclosure of meaning is able to take place. Indeed, it is by means of the non-verbal features of this final line that our analysis can progress from the detection of a single ring to the retrieval of multiply embedded concentric rings: a compositional technique known as an *omphalos* (“navel”). And this retrieval, in turn, supports a movement away from reading the text of line 5 in accordance with its appearances in the *R̥gveda*, to reading it in light of its function within this particular passage, in which the original reference to the *Aśvins* and their chariot acquires new dimensions of meaning.

²⁹⁰ Jamison and Brereton 2014: 49 (vol.1).

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² See the overview in White 2009: 59-67.

The postulation examined in the following paragraphs is that the five lines of this passage, AitĀ 2.3.8, are organized in the form of an outer and inner ring with the single line 3 intended as the center of the concentric composition. Viewed from this perspective, lines 1 and 5 establish an outermost circle dealing with ontological truth and the intersection of personal identity and revelation; lines 2 and 4 establish an inner ring addressing self-transformative knowledge in active practice; and line 3 is the innermost point, where the semantic and trans-semantic facets of the composition come together in a crescendo of precisely balanced meaning that extends at once outwards, disclosing the relatedness of the inner and outer rings, and inwards, providing the key that reveals their action upon the person in the life-world. Moving from the outermost of these rings to the linguistically embedded central line of the composition, the echoic correspondence between *āgatAM ahAM* and *ā-yātAM* establishes an external frame around the gradual shift in subject from *idAM* in line 2 to *ayAM* in line 4. Here, while the sequence of *-am* endings in line 2 corresponds both phonetically and grammatically to the two subjects of line 1, the phonetically resonant interplay between *ayAM* in line 4 and *ā-yātAM* in line 5 utilizes the grammatical discontinuity of these lexical items – which is both hidden and hinted at by the added suggestiveness of *AYAM...Ā...YātAM* – to draw attention to the fact that the key focus of line 5 is not, indeed, what it appears to be.

Again, this is indicated grammatically through the respective relationships of line 2 to line 1 and line 4 to line 5. Firstly, while line 2 utilizes a series of predicates that depict the ritual “chariot” – the expedient thousand *br̥hati* verses that generate thirty-six thousand syllables identified with the number of days in a life fully lived – the anaphoric referent of the pronoun *idam* is neither the ritual nor a connoted chariot, but the identification of *brahman* and *aham* that is iconically presented in the first line. A similar situation occurs in line 4, which is established as the counterpart to line 2 through its reference to the bodily chariot of the gods, and likewise depicts a change of grammatical subject, from chariot to *prāṇa*, in the final clause (in line 2, the shift is from *idam* to the numerical identity of syllables and days). Yet neither “chariot” nor *prāṇa* satisfies the grammatical or thematic subject of line 5: if the internal grammar of the passage

is adhered to, and noting that neither citation from the *Rgveda* explicates either “chariot” as the instrumental referent of *tena* or carries over the addressal of the Aśvins, it appears that this is a case of *viniyoga* in which the instrumental now refers to *prāṇa* as that which is quicker than either the mind or sight – respectively, the horses and driver of the chariot that *prāṇa* stands upon, according to line 4.

Following this, the dual reference of the imperative verb *ā-yātam* may refer to the days and syllables named in line 3; after all, not only is this mutual pair conceptually inclusive of the diversity of phenomena addressed in lines 1, 2, and 4, but it seems sensible that this urgent summoning would correspond to the only two objects that the passage presents as concretely attainable. Thus, while these transitions occur within the concatenated, external phonetic frame *āgatam/ā-yātam*, it is the anagrammatic and repeated reference to the word *jīva* in line 3 that should direct our attention:

line 3: *JĪVĀkṣareṇaiva JĪVĀhar āpnoti JĪVĀhnā JĪVĀkṣaram iti*

line 5: *ā tena yātaṃ manaso JAVĪyasā nimiṣaś cij JAVĪyaseti JAVĪyaseti*

And just as in line 1 the lexical item *āgatam* appears as part of an extended phonetic sequence that supplies the phonemes and inversions required to reach *aham*, thus emphasising its contextualizing function, so the opening sequence of line 5 provides the phonetics required to complete the adjective *javīyasā*. At the same time, it echoes and re-inverts the phonetic progression of line 1 in a variation on the transition *brahma tatrāgatam*:

ā tena YĀtaṃ manaS(Aḥ) javīYASĀ nimiṣaś cij javīYASĀ:iti javīYASĀ:iti

This repetition of *javīyasā* in line 5 suggests that it is a phonetic icon, a sonic picture of the swift motility of *prāṇa*, that retains the atmospheric associations of the verb root $\sqrt{jū}$ from which it is derived. In addition, the utilization in line 4 of the verb *adhitiṣṭhati* to describe the relationship of *prāṇa* to the other senses both complements and advances the posited relationship between superlative speed and the instrumental agency of *prāṇa*: derivatives of *adhi-√sthā* (in the sense “to

inhabit”) are attested in accounts of possession,²⁹³ and its employment here correlates with the more frequent occurrence of *pra-√viś* to describe *prāṇa*’s ability to pervade the body with its deities and to transport them between spheres by becoming established in the wind (*vāyupratiṣṭha*; see Chapter 3). Put simply, these considerations make line 5 into a call for the days and the syllables of life to arrive at the speaker by means of the *prāṇa* that is quicker than the mind or the blinking of an eye, and which already pervades their body in a demonstration of the identity between *brahman* and *aham*. In this instance, however, it is grammar rather than narrative that describes and enacts the revelation.

Now, with respect to position and figure, the embedded central line of the passage is the navel in the omphalos, the fulcrum on which the rest turn. To recap: the initially striking feature of line 3 is the ending in *iti* that it shares with lines 1 and 5, and which emphasizes the importance of the preceding assertion: “By a single syllable of life one attains a day of life; by a day of life, a syllable of life. *Iti*.” This marker aside, the revelatory weight of the line is indexed by the four repetitions of the noun *jīva* compounded alternatively with *akṣara* (syllable; “undecaying”) and *ahar* (day). As in the first and final lines of this passage, the poetic density that is generated by grammatical and phonetic repetitions chips away the semantic surface to shed light on a truth that is manifestly embodied in the internal relationships existing deep within *vāc*.

jīva:akṣareṇaiva jīva:ahar āpnoti jīva:ahnā jīva:akṣaram iti

The droning repetition of initial-position *jīva* and short *a*-initial *akṣara/ahar*, together with the alternation between latter members of the compound, thematically integrates the union of syllables and days of a person’s life (line 2: *puruṣāyuso ’hnām*) with the illustration of living vitality that occurs in line 4 (i.e., the senses as a chariot of gods). At the same time, the identical euphonic synthesis ($a + a > \bar{a}$) occurring at the internal boundary of each of the compounds (*jīvĀkṣareṇaiva jīvĀhar...jīvĀhnā jīvĀkṣaram*) illustrates the transition from *a* to \bar{a} and the equivalence of the first and final lines of the passage. It is, moreover,

²⁹³ F. Smith 2006a: 14.

clear that these repetitions do not only extend outwards to connect the surrounding material. They also draw inwards, framing the verb-form *āpnoti* through a combination of semantic reversal and case variation:

<i>-akṣareṇa</i>	<i>-ahar</i>	<i>ĀPNOTI</i>	<i>-ahnā</i>	<i>-akṣaram</i>
inst.	acc.	VERB	inst.	acc.

Secondly, and even more subtly, *āpnoti* is framed through a metrical patterning that isolates it at the exact center of two sets of nine syllables apiece. Here, the combination of the semantic reversal of *akṣara* and *ahar*, the switching between instrumental and accusative case functions, and the repetition of the fixed structure *jīvākṣara* + enclitic particle generates a frame that is not only measured but mirrored, taking the form

<i>jīvākṣareṇ(aiva)</i>	<i>jīvāhar</i>	<i>ĀPNOTI</i>	<i>jīvāhnā</i>	<i>jīvākṣaram</i> (<i>iti</i>)
1 2 3 4 (5 6)	7 8 9		9 8 7	6 5 4 3 (2 1)

in which the three syllables of *āpnoti* are a metrical icon – the square root – of the surrounding text that itself iconically pictures the equation of a day to a syllable and presents three semantic items on either side of the verb.²⁹⁴ The full set of these overlapping grammatical, phonetic and metrical figures might be represented thus:

<i>jīvākṣareṇaiva</i>	<i>jīvāhar</i>	<i>ĀPNOTI</i>	<i>jīvāhnā</i>	<i>jīvākṣaram iti</i>
1 2 3 4 (5 6)	7 8 9		9 8 7	6 5 4 3 (2 1)
life:by a syllable <i>eva</i>	life:a day	VERB	life:by a day	life:a syllable <i>iti</i>

The precision of these levels of framing strongly suggests that it is neither insignificant nor accidental that the verb *āpnoti* (“one acquires/attains”) makes this passage’s first, and only, reference to a third person subject or actor. Thus, while the phonetic familiarity of the initial-position *ā* of this verb continues the

²⁹⁴ The symmetry and positioning of *āpnoti* is also emphasized by the form of abbreviation that occurs here, with the second *āpnoti* being omitted.

progression of the alliterative movement toward the final line, its sudden grammatical foreignness and embedding at the center of the passage as a whole strongly emphasizes its practical impetus: from the play on *brahman* and personal identity in line 1 to the implicit linguistic embodiment of self-realization in the revelation of line 5, *āpnoti* is the axis that draws this entire passage irrevocably into the self-transformative undertakings of the speaker even as, if not precisely because, it draws the speaker physically into its own frame of reference. This transformation – better, disclosure – of the speaker as the spoken-to is an act of magic that is Sanskrit by any other name.²⁹⁵

Returning now to the examination of La Porta and Shulman’s characterization of grammar as magic, it is clear that, with regard to the *Āraṇyakas*, not only is the world “grammar-ed” in ways that are not always transparent, but the cultural significance of this opacity extends far beyond the simple attestation to grammar’s internal dynamics. Enigma – or, as Watkins aptly puts it, the “conscious tradition of obscurantism” in Indo-European poetics²⁹⁶ – is a hallmark of the underlying belief in the power of language to harness truth (*ṛta*, *satya*) to a diversity of attested ends. And it is a belief that rises to the surface of Vedic oral composition in traceable forms that bind the magic of grammar to the driving forces of self-realization²⁹⁷: poetic techniques such as *bandhu*, in both their semantic and trans-semantic dimensions, share significant conceptual terrain with the human subject, while the grammatical texture of soteriological practices – what makes them a desirable or appropriate or urgent response to a given circumstance, the measures they consist of, and the encoding or conceptualization of their outcomes – is suggestive of their mutuality with the “magical” rites which they are presented alongside of by these texts.

²⁹⁵ Cf. McCarthy 2007 on the Psalms as a “place of encounter” between revelation and congregation.

²⁹⁶ Watkins 1995: 181.

²⁹⁷ Brereton 1999; Jamison 2007; Patton 2003; G. Thompson 1995, 1997a, 1997b, 1998; Watkins 1995: 85-93, 109-116, 179-193. A selective example of these compositional techniques would include self-attestation or the assertion of authority (*ahaṃkāra*, *ātmastuti*), truth formulations (*brahman*) and “truth-acts” (*satyakriyā*), cosmological debates (*brahmodya*), and the intuitive linking of *mantra* to *yajña* (*vinīyoga*). In addition are the various levels of sound and levels of meaning, which inform a typology of “poetics as grammar” (Watkins 1995: 28).

The ontological basis for this assertion lies in the third proposition that was outlined above, namely, that grammar allows for structured transitions between disparate domains. Although the suggested orderliness of these structured transitions might seem to indicate an extrapolation of grammatical rules, including sonic linguistic features, for the purposes of establishing a formal framework for intellectual discourse and argumentation (such as in the classical instance of Sanskrit's deployment as a universal notation system), this appeal to the transcendent or infallible status of Sanskrit dislocates grammar from its identification as a substantial quality of *vāc*. When the pertinence of embodiment and disembodiment is brought into consideration, however, these transitions between disparate domains appear in light of the transactual model or circuit of pervasion discussed in the previous chapter. Grammar, in these terms, is the substance-code identified with *vāc* – the trace *vāc* deposits as it moves on its circuitous path through the nested layers of reality, and the substantial contribution *vāc* makes to the multiplex identities of the different “bodies” that it enters. Moreover, the magic at play is nothing more – and nothing less – than the knowing engagement with the non-imaginary, pre-existing internal structures of a language whose self-disclosure reveals the ties that bind person and cosmos, within and without.

Thus the structured transitions grammar facilitates are not, in the cultural expression of the *Āraṇyakas*, a result of any representative function it might serve as an external, meta-structural paradigm. The structure of grammar *is* the substance of transitions, firstly, with respect to re-arrangements in identity that equate to soteriological transformations of personhood, which require awareness of oneself as embodying numerous multivalent identities. Secondly, these transitions or transactions are circumscribed by the dynamic but hidden linkages that grammar articulates through its generation of multiple linguistic forms. Not only do these linkages disclose the truth of one's identity in combination with the cosmos, but they come together in an enactive paradigm that works on the interior structures of subjectivity and personhood. For one who knows, grammar can be ritually consigned or invited into oneself, or invoked, called up from the deeply hidden layers to the surface of embodiment, where it directs the course of the

transactions and interrelationships that define a person, a hymn, or an altar. To return to an earlier point, this magic is revealed not through a study of grammatical rules, but through the type of deep personal engagement with poetry that comes from extensive exposure and the cultivation implicit in the mastery of oral composition, expressed as a merger with *vāc*'s grammatical coding that leads to the recovery of one's seamless cosmological identity.

Integrating Magic and Revelation

The third book of the AitĀ, corresponding to Books 7 and 8 of the ŚāṅkhĀ, is an especially rich source of material on the intersection between language and transformations of personal identity. Although introducing itself explicitly as the *Samhitā Upaniṣad* (AitĀ 3.1.1: *athātaḥ samhitāyā upaniṣat*, repeated at ŚāṅkhĀ 7.2) and considered by the native tradition to be one of the three Upanishads of the Aitareya school, this text has not been treated as such by modern scholars in what Olivelle has termed a “somewhat artificial” distinction between “the Upaniṣad proper [viz. AitĀ 2.4-6] and the rest of the Āraṇyaka.”²⁹⁸ What is of salient interest about this exclusion is its influencing by early, and largely unchallenged, academic interpretations of the term *saṃhitā* – a derivation of *saṃ-*√*dhā*, to place, join or fasten together; to unite – as it appears in the introduction of AitĀ 3 as specifically intending the *Samhitā*, the fixed (“put together”) form of the Veda as canon.²⁹⁹ With support for the accuracy of this interpretation found in the further association of the proper noun “*Samhitā*” with *sandhi* (conjunction, union), the system of euphonic combinations through which the verbal surface of the Veda acquires its characteristic sonic texture, two short excerpts of AitĀ 3 came to occupy a central role in early Indological attempts to cross-reference the formation of the canon against the development of the *saṃhitāpāṭha* method of textual transmission. While it was this particular set of linkages around the

²⁹⁸ Olivelle 1998: 314; Keith 1909: 39-52.

²⁹⁹ See the essays in Patton 1994. While recent examinations of “canonicity” in the Vedic context are moving increasingly from the study of form to analyses of function and other possible vantage points, the association between *saṃhitā* and a fixed corpus remains largely unchanged.

conceptual nexus of *sam-√dhā* that first drew Müller’s attention to AitĀ 3.1.3 and 3.1.5 in his 1869 study of the *Ṛgveda Prātiśākhya*, it was the intellectual grafting of this interpretation back into Book 3 by A. B. Keith that led to his narrow definition of this text as an exposition of “the mystical meaning of the various forms of the text of the Saṃhitā, the *nirbhujā*, *pratr̥ṇṇa* and *ubhayamantareṇa*, and of the vowels, semivowels and consonants.”³⁰⁰ Thus the following two excerpts – which together represent less than a twelfth of AitĀ 3 – would inform an understanding of *saṃhitā* that obscured the vast bulk of this text, including descriptions of rituals and recitations used to realize *saṃhitā* as a soteriological goal and the repeated emphasis on its occurrence within the boundaries of physical embodiment: “In the third Upaniṣad, III, 1-2”, states Keith, “there is little of philosophical interest.”³⁰¹

*athāto nirbhujapravādāḥ / pṛthivyāyatanam nirbhujam divyāyatanam
pratr̥ṇṇam antarikṣāyatanam ubhayamantareṇa / atha yady enaṃ
nirbhujam bruvantam upavaded acyoṣṭāvarābhyāṃ sthānābhyāṃ ity enaṃ
brūyāt / atha yady enaṃ pratr̥ṇṇam bruvantam upavaded acyoṣṭā
uttarābhyāṃ sthānābhyāṃ ity enaṃ brūyāt / yas tv evobhayamantareṇāha
tasya nāsty upavādah / yad dhi saṃdhiṃ vivartayati tan nirbhujasya rūpam
atha yac chuddhe akṣare abhivyāharati tat pratr̥ṇṇasyāgra u
evobhayamantareṇobhayam vyāptam bhavati / AitĀ 3.1.3*

Next come the sayings about the *nirbhujā* [= *saṃhitāpāṭha*]. The *nirbhujā* has the earth as its abode; the *pratr̥ṇṇa* [= *padapāṭha*] has heaven as its abode; the *ubhayamantareṇa* [= *kramapāṭha*] has the ether between as its abode. Now, if (someone) curses one who is pronouncing the *nirbhujā*, he should respond by saying, “you have fallen from the two lower conditions.” If (someone) curses one who is pronouncing the *pratr̥ṇṇa*, he should respond by saying, “you have fallen from the two higher conditions.” But there is no cursing the one who says the *ubhayamantareṇa*. For when one produces the conjunction (*saṃdhi*), that is the *nirbhujā*-form; and when one utters the two syllables pure, that is the *pratr̥ṇṇa*-form; (but) foremost indeed is the *ubhayamantareṇa* – it extends to both.

This identification of linguistic and textual profiles – of *sandhi* and Saṃhitā – is seen again in the second passage, AitĀ 3.1.5, where it appears as part of a more

³⁰⁰ Müller 1869: iii-vii; Keith 1909: 17. In addition, Keith cites Oldenburg (1888: 380, 1892: 146) and Macdonell (1900: 49-52) as authorities on this defining interpretation of AitĀ 3.

³⁰¹ Keith 1909: 44.

clearly explicated development between the mode of verbalization (viz. the *saṃhitāpāṭha*) and its enactive impact within the living identity of a human subject who knows:

*atha khalv āhur nirbhujavaktrāḥ / pūrvam akṣaram pūrvarūpam uttaram
uttararūpam yo 'vakāśaḥ pūrvarūpottararūpe antareṇa sā saṃhiteti / sa ya
evam etāṃ saṃhitāṃ veda saṃdhīyate prajayā paśubhir yaśasā
brahmavarcasena svargeṇa lokena sarvam āyur iti / AitĀ 3.15.*

Then the teachers of the *nirbhujā* say: “The preceding syllable is the preceding form; the following, the following form; the interval between the preceding form and the following form is the union (*saṃhitā*).” One who knows thus this union (*saṃhitā*) is united (*saṃdhīyate*) with offspring, livestock, glory, the splendour of *brahman*, and the world of heaven for all their life.

Contrary to the earlier summarization of Book 3 by Keith, which arrives at a comprehensive interpretation only by prescriptively ignoring those passages that cannot fit with the reading of “*Samhitā*-text,” we might contend these sequences strongly suggest that self-transformation requires language, and language requires an embodied subject, producing the real terms of revelation. Further, what they also suggest is that the focus of AitĀ 3 (likewise, ŚāṅkhĀ 7-8) is not the collection of hymns that constitute the Veda as a corpus, but rather *saṃhitā* as a phenomenon, a living condition of integration that is both ontologically veridical and personally achieved.³⁰² Rather than isolating *saṃhitā* and *sandhi* in their literary aspect, this approach allows the entirety of the *Samhitā Upaniṣad*'s contents to be seen as an elaboration on the dynamics of *sam-√dhā*, which by the middle Vedic period is attested as carrying the further and frequently self-reflexive nuances of mending, restoration, and redress: “He put himself back together” (*sa...ātmānaṃ samadadhād*, AitĀ 3.2.6).

³⁰² Shulman 2012: 131: “It is critical to understand that none of these activities transpiring within awareness, with its external correlates, is “symbolic” in any sense of the word familiar to us. I would be prepared to argue that symbolism as such is relatively rare in South Asia, and I recommend avoiding the word altogether for contexts such as those described here [viz. *saṃpads*, *mahāvākyas*, and the transformative force of Vedic speech].”

Considered alongside instances from the corresponding portions of ŚāṅkhĀ,³⁰³ this brings a panoply of interrelated aspects of *sam-√dhā* into view: firstly, the connection between Saṃhitā and grammatical/poetic features, just discussed; secondly, the unions, conjunctions, and compacts (*saṃhata*, a phonetic relative) that exist between a diverse array of divine, ritualized, and personalised phenomena, and include also the act of unification (*saṃdhāna*) and its agency (*saṃdhātr*), often articulated in *bandhus*; thirdly, the state either resulting from or instigating the action of *sam-√dhā* (thus *saṃdhīyate*, “he is united”), and frequently involving some aspect of the Saṃhitā as a trigger or an instrument; and fourthly, the truth of a person’s identity and a cultivated soteriological state with repercussions before and after death. AitĀ 3.1.6 provides a representative example of these nuances in action:

*vāk prāṇena saṃhiteti kauṅṭharavyaḥ prāṇaḥ pavamānena pavamāno
viśvair devair viśve devāḥ svargeṇa lokena svargo loko brahmaṇā
saiśāvaraparā saṃhitā / sa yo haitām avaraparām saṃhitām vedaivaṃ
haiva sa prajāyā paśubhir yaśasā brahmavarcasena svargeṇa lokena
saṃdhīyate yathaiśā saṃhitā / sa yadi pareṇa vopasṛtaḥ svena
vārthenābhiviyāhared abhiviyāhārṣann eva vidyād divaṃ saṃhitāgamad
viduṣāṃ devānām evaṃ bhaviṣyatīti / śaśvat tathā syat / sa ya evam etām
saṃhitām veda saṃdhīyate prajāyā paśubhir yaśasā brahmavarcasena
svargeṇa lokena sarvam āyur iti / AitĀ 3.1.6³⁰⁴*

“Vāc is united with *prāṇa*,” says Kauṅṭharavya, “*prāṇa* with the flowing air, the flowing air with the All Gods, the All Gods with the world of heaven, the world of heaven with *brahman* – this is the union in inverted order (*avaraparā saṃhitā*). One who knows exactly thus the union inverted is united (*saṃdhīyate*) with offspring, livestock, glory, the splendour of *brahman*, and the world of heaven in such a way as is this union. If one is about to utter [it] for either their own or another’s sake, let them know as they utter that the union has gone up to heaven, and so as it is for the gods’ it will be for the wise.” It will always be thus: One who knows thus this union (*saṃhitā*) is united (*saṃdhīyate*) with offspring, livestock, glory, the splendour of *brahman*, and the world of heaven for all their life.

³⁰³ While ŚāṅkhĀ 7.2 explicitly names itself the *Saṃhitā Upaniṣad* and the majority of passages corresponding to AitĀ 3 occur in ŚāṅkhĀ 7-8, ŚāṅkhĀ 11.3-12.8 also consists of parallel instances and other rites of high similarity. This is not altogether surprising given the high degree of variability demonstrated across manuscripts of the ŚāṅkhĀ.

³⁰⁴ Cf. ŚāṅkhĀ 7.14.

The hidden connections entwining in *saṃhitā* provide this passage with its forward momentum. As it continues, moving from one disclosure of *sam-√dhā* to the next, these connections facilitate a poetically complex integration of the *Ṛgveda Saṃhitā* with middle Vedic cosmology by unfolding, in unison, the various semantic interpretations available for both “Prajāpati” (*prajā:pati:* lord of creatures; husband and offspring; the cosmic progenitor) and “Aditi” (*a-diti:* not tied, unbroken; the goddess of unending abundance) within the frame provided by human procreation. Again, this occurs across multiple grammatical levels, which point back to the third and central line as providing the key to this play on *saṃhitā*: “For all this is continuous, whatever there is....”

*athātaḥ prajāpatisaṃhitā / jāyā pūrvarūpaṃ patir uttararūpaṃ putraḥ
saṃdhiḥ prajānanam saṃdhānam saiṣāditiḥ saṃhitā / aditir hīdam sarvaṃ
yad idaṃ kiñca pitā ca mātā ca putraś ca prajānanam ca / tad apy etad
ṛṣinoktam / aditir mātā sa pitā sa putra iti // sa ya evam etāṃ saṃhitāṃ
veda saṃdhīyate prajāyā paśubhir yaśasā brahmavarcasena svargeṇa
lokena sarvaṃ āyur iti // AitĀ 3.1.6³⁰⁵*

Next comes the Prajāpati union. The wife is the preceding form; the husband the following form; the son the connection (*saṃdhi*); procreation the putting-together (*saṃdhāna*) – this is the continuous union (*aditiḥ saṃhitā*). For all this is continuous (*aditi*), whatever there is, the father and the mother and the son and the procreation. This has also been said by a *ṛṣi*: “Aditi is the mother; she is the father, she the son.”³⁰⁶ One who knows thus this union (*saṃhitā*) is united (*saṃdhīyate*) with offspring, livestock, glory, the splendour of *brahman*, and the world of heaven for all their life.

The resulting impression is of multiple view-points onto a single reality; and to these must be added a fifth aspect of *sam-√dhā* that can be retrieved from AitĀ 3 and ŚāṅkhĀ 7-8: namely, the array of rites to protect or induce one’s cultivated state of integration with the cosmos, and which include imprecations (*anuvyāhāra*) used to divert curses, offerings and recitations to ensure heavenly apotheosis, and a *ṛc* verse to endow oneself with the essence of speech (*vāgrasaḥ*). What the inclusion of these practices reveal is that *saṃhitā* is a personally desirable state of integration that spans both the orthodox

³⁰⁵ See ŚāṅkhĀ 7.15 for a variant on this passage.

³⁰⁶ RV 1.89.10; translation by Jamison and Brereton 2014: 222 (vol.1). Note that the reading *aditir mātā sa pitā sa putra* is consistent with that of the RV given in Van Nooten and Holland 1994.

circumscription of Sanskrit as bound to sacral knowledge and its appearance in worldly applications that challenge conservative notions of what constitutes *vaidika* ritual activity. This indicates a need to review the accuracy of the notion that, in the mid- to late-Vedic period, Sanskrit had a “mutually self-limiting relationship with textualized discourse on liturgy and liturgical knowledges: this discourse was composed exclusively in Sanskrit, and Sanskrit culture consisted entirely of this discourse.”³⁰⁷ Either we must expand what is meant by liturgical knowledge, such that it includes the entire and diverse array of practices involving this language, or we must rethink the boundary separating the ritual arena from the world, and bring their radical delimitation into question.

Samhitā and Saṃskṛta

That fact that it is *saṃhitā* as a principle, a goal, and an active transformation based in the linkage of two or more objects, their instruments and media, that provides the common orientation behind all five of these aspects (which, though simplified, do account for the multifarious contents of the Aitareyan and Śāṅkhāyanan texts) brings us immediately to two conclusions that will strongly influence the remaining discussion. First, the often difficult relationship between the texts’ self-identification as *Samhitā Upaniṣads* and the diversity of their content-matter should be taken to indicate positively that *saṃhitā* is a multivalent concept. Its openness of reference, together with its definitive demand for the linkage or integration of diverse entities and identities, is precisely the point and the means by which these texts progress: in the worldview of the R̥gvedic Āraṇyakas, the separation of revelation and its unions (or hidden connections, *upaniṣad*), on one hand, from magic with its *bandhus*, on the other, is a logically meaningless exercise because both are equally entrenched in the dynamics of personal adaptation to *vāc*. This co-ordination is described as an infusion, a permeation between bodies in which changes to a person’s lived circumstances in the world are a reflection of changes introduced within their internal embodied

³⁰⁷ Pollock 2006: 49-50.

milieu and realized through the shifting structures of identity. Such a dynamic interpretation may challenge the foregoing association between *saṃhitā* and canon, yet what it does achieve is an understanding of revelation and language that operates in tandem with primary depictions of embodiment.

Secondly, the weight of these considerations, the observation that the minimum requirement for revelation is a transformative and subjective coordination of the person to the structures of a trans-individual reality, and, in particular, the centrality of *vāc* in its encompassment of the transactions required by *saṃhitā* suggest that rather than looking for a language named Sanskrit it would be more productive to ask what it means to become *saṃskṛta*. This is in marked contrast to the engagement between language and individuality prevalent in Western-influenced Indological scholarship, which has pushed Sanskrit into the narrow space of a type-cast by valuing the individual in terms of their uniqueness and inviolability – both of which may be considered fundamental human rights in our current intellectual era, but neither of which are considered characteristic of any “definitive human unit” in Vedic ways of perceiving the person, their body, and the cosmos.³⁰⁸ It also asks that we view Sanskrit not as an hegemonic constraint upon individual expression, but in light of *vāc*’s substantial contributions to the construction or attainment of personal identity. While the verbal root *sam-√kṛ* and its derivatives (*saṃskṛta*, *saṃskṛti*) appear only a handful of times in the Ṛgvedic Āraṇyakas, it is clear from these occurrences that it is not employed simply in the sense of making, doing, or producing something completely (i.e., “well-made”). Nor is it employed in the sense of adornment, a non-integral and ornamental addition to an already-complete form (e.g., AitĀ 1.3.4: *ātmānaṃ pañcaviṃśaṃ saṃskurute*; in Keith’s translation, “he adorns the self, the twenty-fifth [with the recitation]”). Rather, in all instances, *sam-√kṛ* and its derivatives occur wholly in the far more specific sense of a state of completion that is intentionally effected through the introduction of revelatory language into the subject.

*tad etad aiṣṭikaṃ karma yaṃ ātmānaṃ adhvaryuḥ saṃskaroti tasmin
yajurmayaṃ pravayati yajurmaya ṛimayaṃ hota ṛimaye sāmamayaṃ*

³⁰⁸ F. Smith 2006a: 586-589; cf. Eck 1993: 59-60.

udgātā sa eṣa trayyai vidyāyā ātmaīṣa u evaitad indrasyātmā bhavati ya evaṃ veda / ŚāṅkhĀ 4.6

The *adhvaryu* completes (*saṃskaroti*) the body, this activity belonging to the sacrifice – on it he weaves the measure of the *yajus*; on the *yajus*, the *hotṛ* weaves the measure of the *ṛc*; on the *ṛc*, the *udgātṛ* weaves the measure of the *sāman*. One who knows thus becomes the body of this Threefold Knowledge, they alone become the body of Indra.

aṣṭādaśāṣṭādaśākṣarāṇi bhavanti yāni daśa nava prāṇā ātmaiva daśamaḥ sātmanaḥ saṃskṛtir aṣṭāv aṣṭā udyante / aśnute yad yat kāmāyate ya evaṃ veda // AitĀ 1.3.7

[The recitations] become eighteen syllables apiece; of the ten syllables, nine are breaths (*prāṇa*) and the tenth is oneself – this is the completion [of the recitation] together with the self (*sātmanaḥ saṃskṛtir*); the remaining sets of eight syllables rise up. One who knows thus attains whatever they desire.

The activity of the root *sam-√kr* also takes hold of the other “bodies” – offerings, altar, and human participants – that provide the basic media of the circuitous transactions that characterize early Brahmanical ritual. In this connection, it is worthwhile revisiting AitĀ 1.3.8, the passage that provided an example of *bandhus* at the very beginning of the present chapter:

... āyur vā uṣṇig vāg anuṣṭup / tad asminn āyus ca vācaṃ ca dadhāti / tās triḥ prathamayā pañcaviṃśatir bhavanti pañcaviṃśa ātmā pañcaviṃśaḥ prajāpatir daśa hastyā aṅgūlayo daśa pādyaḥ dvā ūrū dvau bāhū ātmaiva pañcaviṃśas tam imam ātmānaṃ pañcaviṃśaṃ saṃskurute / atho pañcaviṃśaṃ vā etad ahaḥ pañcaviṃśa etasyāhnū stomaḥ tat samena samaṃ pratipadyate tasmād dve eva pañcaviṃśatir bhavanti /

... the *uṣṇih* is life, the *anuṣṭubh* speech (*vāc*). Thus he places life and speech in this [offering/altar/body]. With the first repeated three times, the verses come up to twenty-five; the body (*ātman*) consists of twenty-five and Prajāpati consists of twenty-five: the ten digits of the hands, the ten of the feet, two legs, two arms, and the core (*ātman*) are twenty-five. He completes (*saṃskurute*) that, this body consisting of twenty-five. Further, this day is twenty-five (*pañcaviṃśa*) and the *stoma* of this day is the Pañcaviṃśa – identity is recovered through identity; thus they both become twenty-five.

It is the physical act of recitation that weaves the markedly diverse entities named in this passage into a space of shared subjectivity (a complex and dividual, though now interconnected, body) that is identifiable with revelation itself – its substance, its meaning and its means – and allows the completion indicated by *sam-√kr* to occur across multiple locations at once. If this is correct, then it might viably be argued that in bringing hidden connections to the surface, and thus into a degree of manifestation at which they can be placed (*√dhā*) or woven (*pra-√ve*) in bodies by one who knows thus, *bandhus* are an enactment of *sam-√kr*. Put otherwise, *bandhus* describe the processes – experiential and perceptual, and therefore phenomenological³⁰⁹ – of being *saṃskṛta*, of personally realizing a state of completion that is coterminous with the language of its truthful expression (*sātmanah saṃskṛtiḥ*, AitĀ 1.3.7).³¹⁰ Conversely, such an understanding of *saṃskṛta* reflects both the physiological accounts of the consolidation of personal identity seen in the previous chapter and also the grammatical disclosure of relationships examined above, and further intersects with the soteriological requirement of integration that is articulated by the activity of *sam-√dhā* and its derivative forms.

To the extent that these transformations demand a seamless adaptation of a person’s lived reality, an open-ended matrix of knowing, becoming and enacting, to the circulating flow of cosmic dynamics that characterise this all (*idaṃ sarvam*), *vāc* is uniquely and determinatively positioned by its provision of the means and model alike for the reconfiguration of identity in accordance with the truth of manifestation. Whilst avoiding the quicksand of entering into modern discussions of mystical awareness and language, it is worthwhile taking note of Frederick Streng’s conclusion that the “soteriological significance of language...is related to the function of language in communicating the nature of reality that is assumed in the mystical awareness.”³¹¹ Unlike a number of recent

³⁰⁹ Sheets-Johnstone 2012: 193.

³¹⁰ Streng 1978: 149: “The knowledge of God (Brahman, Thusness) in the mystical insight is not simply subjective or objective since to know in the ultimate context is to ‘become’ or ‘be’ in an extraordinary way.” This presents scholars of such texts with the unique challenge of developing interpretative approaches that do not run contrary to the claims of the texts. This point raised by Streng (1978: 166) forms the basis of an extended discussion presented in Kripal 1995: 17-22.

³¹¹ Streng 1978: 165.

scholars – among them Matilal, Kripal, Ganeri, and Katz³¹² – who frame their analyses of mystical language in terms originating from Classical Indian and Western traditions of logic and exegesis, Streng’s conclusion proceeds from his observations of language-use in Buddhist and Brahmanical revelatory, rather than intellectual, materials. The closeness thus kept to primary texts of mystical awareness, texts which do not attempt to forge universal explanations (indeed, if any at all) of the relation between the knower and the known, informs his development of an incisive argument that there is a basic misconception in treating non-dual mysticism as a monothetic phenomenon in which concerns with the referential qualities of language, inherited from the Judeo-Christian tradition, are universally applicable (“mystics interpret the function of language differently”).³¹³ This is important because, in avoiding inadvertent recourse to questions of ineffability – which, in any case, rotate around a logical dilemma of duality that clearly presents no obstacle whatsoever to the composers of the *Āraṇyakas* – Streng is able to locate an alternative to the problem of linguistic referentiality by seeing language as non-separate to the reality of which the late Vedic texts speak.³¹⁴

Returning now to the point raised above – that is more productive to ask what it means to become *samskṛta* than to look for Sanskrit as a language with a merely circumstantial association with revelation – it is unsurprising to find that the passages that utilize the root *sam-√kr* and its derivatives employ poetic techniques to index the change in state suggested by the verb in a direct expression of the relationship between *vāc*’s soteriological significance and communicative function. This occurs particularly as an operation of what might be termed an intentional ambiguity: as the texts proceed from recitation to result, their intended points of reference become increasingly elusive at the same time as the initial diversity of objects identified (priest, patrons, verses recited, offerings, altar, and so on) are compressed into a single field or focus in an exact match of

³¹² See for example Matilal 2002; Kripal 1995; Ganeri 1999, 2007; Katz 2013.

³¹³ Streng 1978: 141.

³¹⁴ Unlike Streng, Kripal’s analysis is shaped by recourse to the *aporia* of transcendence, i.e., that it must be beyond names. This leads him to speak of the mystical as something hidden from the referential structures of language after the sense of *apophasis* as a negative theology or “un-saying” (Kripal 1995: 20-21; cf. Sells 1994:2).

poetic and ritual progressions. Take for example the following excerpt from AitĀ 1.1.4, in which grammatical and phonetic associations facilitate a transition from *niṣkṛta* to *saṃskṛta* while the removal of *niṣkṛta* from its original embedding in the Ṛgvedic *sūkta* allows for an expansion of reference to the end that it is no longer clear whether the second occurrence of *saṃskṛta* describes the soma-pressings prepared by one who knows or refers to a quality belonging to the one who knows. This ambiguity is heightened by the appearance of the genitive *asya* where an instrumental would typically be anticipated, a genitive whose properly possessive function is suggested by a second genitive, *yeṣām*, but which may serve the equally formal if somewhat less common function of indicating agency:

indravāyū ime sutā ā yātum upa niṣkṛtam iti yad vai niṣkṛtaṃ tat saṃskṛtam / ā hāsyendravāyū saṃskṛtaṃ gacchato ya evaṃ veda yeṣāṃ caivaṃ vidvād etad dhotā śaṃsati / AitĀ 1.1.4

[In the verse³¹⁵] “O Indra and Vāyu, here are the soma-pressings; come near to the prepared,” what is prepared (*niṣkṛta*) is what is completed (*saṃskṛta*). Indra and Vāyu surely come to what has been completed by (/what is complete of) the one who knows thus or for whom a hotṛ knowing thus recites.

In light of the sense of completeness suggested by *sam-√kr*, characterized by a revelatory disclosure of identity across an interconnected space of shared subjectivity, it may be argued that this ambiguity of reference is itself pregnant with meaning.

A further example of this phenomenon may be drawn from AitĀ 1.5.1, in which the ambiguity pertains, firstly, to whether it is the body of the reciter, the altar, or the cosmic progenitor that contains the breaths; secondly, to whether it is the breaths or the recitation that has been completed; and, thirdly, to the exact location in space or time that is intended by “here” (*atra*). This is not to say, however, that the text displays an high degree of indeterminacy concerning its subject-matter. The form or style and content of the passage are consistent, marked by a mutual illumination and a particular approach to explanation. The poetic result is one of expressive precision, a precision relevant to its subject, in

³¹⁵ ṚV 1.2.4.

which the text exemplifies its message by demonstrating the affective activity of the verb.³¹⁶

tām atrotsrjati dvādaśakṛtvah śastvā dvādaśavidhā vā ime prāṇāḥ sapta śīrṣaṇyā dvau stanyau trayo 'vāñco 'tra vai prāṇā āpyante 'tra saṃskriyante tasmād enām atrotsrjati / AitĀ 1.5.1

He ceases here after reciting [the verse] twelve times. These breaths (*prāṇa*) are twelve-fold – there are seven in the head, two in the chest, and three below – in here are the breaths contained, and here are they completed (*saṃskriyante*), thus he ceases [the recitation] here.

Sanskrit is able to express the truth of reality experienced by the one who knows thus because it is phenomenally intrinsic to the manifestation of that reality, including the knower and the structures of personhood, and hence also the personal transformation entailed by becoming *saṃskṛta*. Pertinently, this means viewing *saṃ-√kṛ* in the fullness of its instrumentality, wherein the state of awareness indicated by knowing thus (*evam*) is a “genuine action (*karman*)”³¹⁷ with both ontological and soteriological repercussions. Following this, if the claims contained in *bandhus* are retained, then it is apparent that such repercussions extend beyond the immediacy of the knower and into the wider space of their environment in ways that are veridical and affective. In this connection, Shulman makes the observation that,

The general principle involved is two fold, ubiquitous in ritual domains as well as in Indian models of the mind: the subtle and invisible always generates (devolves into) the crude and visible, and what is initially externalized or objectified in imperfect form can, indeed must, be reworked through mental, mantric, and/or ritual processes to become whole (*saṃskṛta*).³¹⁸

This continuity between cosmological evolution and personal achievement, and also its processual recovery as a state of completion (*viz.* wholeness), derive their

³¹⁶ This analysis is influenced by Martha Nussbaum’s work on the intersection between style and content (1990: 3-53).

³¹⁷ Deutsche 1988: 172; also Potter (1988: 29) on the axiomatic understanding that “acting is a making, awareness (mental activity) is acting, and so awareness is making.” In this connection, I draw attention to the Indic religious concern with *saṃskāras*, both in the sense of initiatory rites that mold personhood in specific ways and also as mental acts (*karman*) in the form of traces.

³¹⁸ Shulman 2012: 133.

particular texture from *vāc*'s defining characteristics. These may be broadly summarized as follows: (1) its integral disclosure of reality or fundamental affinity with manifestation, exemplified as an infinitude of multiplicity arising from a singular, infinitesimally subtle relationship; (2) its extreme pervasiveness and transactability, through which the characteristics in the preceding point are enacted; and (3) a marked shift in linguistic expression or “distancing of the poetic message from ordinary human language”³¹⁹ that corresponds to a “transformation of the use of both form and the formless.”³²⁰ The active harnessing of the silent invisibilities contained within *vāc*, alongside its simultaneous presence inside and outside of the human body (as speech and as language), completes the process of manifestation that Shulman identifies as the achievement of *saṃskṛta*.

Before turning to an examination of *sam-√kṛ* and *sam-√dhā* in light of the concern with collapse that can be traced out in numerous rites depicted by the R̥gvedic Āraṇyakas, one final observation regarding the literary context of *saṃskṛta* is in place. With respect to a posited continuity of involvement between *sam-√kṛ* as a specific kind of making grounded in a quality of awareness (*veda*) and the Sanskrit language as implicated in the archetypal revelation of the Veda, it is necessary to draw attention to the fact that all employments of this lexeme occur in relation to the recitative performance of the Mahāvratā, including the construction of the altar, and, in the majority of cases, occur in relation specifically to the performance's impact on the *ātman*. The context provided by this literary consideration significantly reinforces the reading of *sam-√kṛ* outlined so far. Indeed, based on evidence drawn from Malamoud's work on *yajñā* and ritual transformations of identity, it may be confidently asserted that the interrelationship of *sam-√kṛ*, recitation (*√śams*, or silent repetition, *√jap*), and the *ātman* as a core or central totality is a widely attested characteristic of middle Vedic perceptions of an affective identification between language, personal embodiment, and cosmic processes.³²¹ Recalling also the depths and expansiveness disclosed by *bandhus* and their valorization in the underlying mode

³¹⁹ Watkins 1995: 183.

³²⁰ Streng 1978: 164.

³²¹ For example, Malamoud 1989, 1996, 2002, 2004.

of grammar, we might further contend that the success of *sam-√kr* demands a knowing engagement of the human with their external environment in a self-reflexive actualization of primordial connections. In Malamoud's words:

The Brahmanic doctrine is that the sacrificer, in constructing the sacrifice, is also constructing himself, and providing himself with a body in which the constituent elements of the sacrifice take the place of the organic materials of his profane body. ...by virtue of the sacrifice he reaches heaven with a "body" [*ātman*] made of verses, formulas, melodies and offerings. He has incorporated the sacrifice, and therefore consists of *chandās*, metric schemes and poetry of the Veda; he has become *chandomaya*. The body of Man is the model for, and the origin of, the sacrifice and is therefore both its departure point and its effect. But the sacrifice for its part, in the guise of Speech – which is its final form – is what gives the body its ultimate substance.³²²

The transformative role of language positively affirms that it would be a mistake to interpret these occurrences of *sam-√kr* as either a set formula or a mere representation of what is properly ineffable. To echo Streng, the recurring features of this contextualization should rightly be mined for what they say of language's role in expressing reality according to the *Āraṇyakas*' worldview: it is clear that the intricate weaving of *bandhus*, with their internally varying degrees of subtle abstraction and mutual embedding with physiological functions and macrocosmic processes, corresponds to a transformed use of "form and the formless" that closes any perceived distance between cosmological evolution and personal achievement by finding in both the manifestation of reality and its truth.³²³ And again, it is clear that such processual continuity between internal and external milieux bears strongly upon these traditional accounts of self-realization, namely, through the dual implication that the reality uncovered in states of awareness accounts for the very substance and possibility of awareness and its expression through the person as a shifting collocation of disembodied influences and entities. This indicates that the relationship of Sanskrit to revelation is one of a substantial fusion of identities extending through language, the person, and the

³²² Malamoud 1989: 97.

³²³ Such identifications are not limited to Indic religious traditions, but have also been observed in the conceptual backdrop to Confucianism, among other traditions of practice. See for example Ames 1984: 118; Tu Wei-ming 1972.

cosmos as so many focal-points within the already-interrelated field of “this all”; and it encodes the potential of crafting a state that is whole or complete, *saṃskṛta*, on the basis of its co-ordinated complexity and resolution of the oscillating dynamics of manifestation.

What these passages reveal, then, is that language which is *saṃskṛta* cannot be symbolic of or derive its own significance from something outside of itself, such as the poetic legacy of the *ṛṣis* or associations with transcendent authority.³²⁴ Its meaning, to significantly adapt Staal’s “meaninglessness” thesis, lies in the fact of its being and the affect of its presence, neither of which require a derivative or referential dimension³²⁵ – a point easily overlooked in the scholarly adumbrance that language, as akin the popular twentieth century examples of ritual and birdsong, must be “a system of signs with a function outside this system,”³²⁶ or else if it eludes this communicative function, which is often the case with *mantras*, must be “prelinguistic.” The conflictual nature of these positions is relevant because it arises from the way each conceives of the relationship between language and the human subject in accordance with prevailing cultural assumptions about what is “natural.” Germane to this is the dedication of modern linguistics to explaining language through the lens of its neural and biological foundations, which are attributed universal legitimacy not only because language was “the first distinct cognitive module to be supported by scientific evidence,”³²⁷ but because of the natural fact that all language-users have brains. This has resulted in the tendency for traditional explanations to become displaced – or, apparently, improved upon: “Brāhmaṇa interpretations are more fanciful than anything contemporary scholars have yet come up with.”³²⁸ Following this assertion, it comes as no surprise that Staal returns to a cognition-based analysis of *mantras* and their function despite his initially promising steps

³²⁴ This is not deny the undeniable role of such associations in social arenas that are not specifically soteriological in their interests.

³²⁵ A similar interpretation of Staal’s thesis appears in F. Smith’s conclusions regarding the significance of the body possessed (2006a: 583).

³²⁶ Jamison and Witzel 1992: 42; G. Thompson 1997c.

³²⁷ Fromkin 1999: 32.

³²⁸ Staal 1991: 59.

towards a clarification of Vedic ritual from within a sympathetic point of view.³²⁹

He writes:

The mystical state is a prelinguistic state of mind that can be reached when language is renounced, through silence, mantras, or rites. Absence of language accounts for most or all of its allegedly blissful nature... Accordingly, mantras do not transform a person or lead to a new existence; on the contrary, they give access to a state or condition that at all times was already there. This simply means, *on our interpretation*, that the prelinguistic condition continues to exist beneath a state of awareness now steeped in language...³³⁰

Concerns with distance between the immediacy of experience and words as pragmatic carriers of information, value placed on propositional content that can be traced in the world, and the desirability of neurolinguistic evidence as a footing of truth all correspond to implicitly cultural notions about our own biological functioning and can be located within a spectrum of self-understanding that determines the bedrock of empiricism. For modern scholars who prize the contributions of science to the advancement of the humanities, conceiving a sharp and qualitative distinction between the two, the above notions are often difficult to see as such; and they are even harder to shake.³³¹

Yet, the fact is that if the Āraṇyakas' understandings about what constitutes a natural bodily relationship between humans and language are given precedence, then what we find is that *saṃskṛta* points to the functional – and significantly open-ended – possibilities of an intersection between *vāc* and the porosity of embodiment. Not only does this make good sense in view of the dynamics of disembodiment and transaction that underscore the Āraṇyakas' accounts of personhood and creation, but, to paraphrase Frederick Smith, it

³²⁹ See the critique of Staal's thesis by Jamison and Witzel (1992: 41-42).

³³⁰ Staal 1991: 80; emphasis added. The intellectual preference Staal grants to the Mīmāṃsaka traditions limits his criteria for "mantra"; cf. the alternative interpretations of meaning elucidated in Coward's turn to Bhartṛhari's philosophy of language (1991). G. Thompson's (1997c: 590) critique of Staal comes closer to what I am arguing here; he writes: "In my view...mantras presuppose an *idea* about language. Any theory of mantras which ignores this fact cannot be an adequate one."

³³¹ Diana Eck (1993: 59-60) observes of this point that the "monotheism of the West is not simply the intellectual concern of theologians or the doctrinal concern of the faithful... (It) has not only to do with our way of thinking about God, but with our way of thinking about persons as "individuals," our way of thinking about authority in the structures of family, church, and state, and our way of thinking about questions of truth."

makes good “Sanskrit” sense: just as *ṛc* verses are taken from their setting within Vedic hymns and applied (*vinīyoga*), like medicine, to the body of the sacrifice, and in this way bring a new state into being, so the activity of *sam-√kr* demonstrates an intentional enhancement of identity wrought on the introduction of language’s meaning-as-itself into the influenceable structures of another manifest form.³³² It is to this extended context of human creativity that we now turn.

After Emitting the Creatures, God Fell Apart

To see these aspects of *vāc* in effect, they need to be viewed against the background of a cosmos in which the potential for collapse and urgency to integrate are encoded at the level of creation. The naturalization of these paired tensions within the interlocking time-cycles of life (*āyur*) and the year (*saṃvatsara*), their expression in the diminution and balance of physiological elements and functions, and their disclosure of a common sensibility behind the diversity of rites detailed by the composers of the Ṛgvedic Āraṇyakas all point to a cultural apprehension of inherently soteriological facets to manifestation that extend far beyond the intensified formal sphere of *yajña*. The hovering and sometimes unavoidable realities of falling apart or becoming internally and externally unfastened (*vi-√śraṃs*), of one’s essential identity flying open and asunder (*vi-√hā*) from the *puruṣa*, and of a lunar cycle whose waxing and waning preys on peoples’ *prāna*, offspring, and livestock do not only cohere with the Vedic vision of deities entering and exiting the body. These concerns draw Sanskrit into the physical space and practices of the world with all the fears,

³³² Shulman’s (2012: 21) incisive observations about *bhāvanā* are worth citing at length: “If we insist that *bhāvanā*, the active, integrative business of creation, resides inside the verb, either in the root or in the final morpheme, are we then describing a linguistic *representation* of creative process or, in some definable sense, the process itself? Although ostensibly the former should be the case, there are good reasons to believe that the latter is more correct... Driven by its own internal mechanisms, which are strongly correlated to conceptual processes unfolding within our awareness – not always a conscious awareness, by the way – language habitually generates realities of varying intensities and existential urgency; *bhāvanā* is intrinsic to any such evolution into form”.

hopes, interactions, and commitments that make up the richness of lived religiosity.

As already noted, two of the most prominent features of *sam-√kr* are the transaction of the reality being linguistically manifested in *vāc* into the mutable collocation of substances and entities that constitute the core or *ātman* of the subject, and the restriction of its occurrences to those portions of the *Āraṇyakas* which explicitly address the Mahāvratā. Regardless of this latter feature, it appears that the phenomenon designated by *sam-√kr* is assumed in other passages of these texts, where *sam-√dhā*, and likewise the verbs *sam-√pad* (to become full or complete; to unite with) and *sam-√rdh* (to flourish, increase greatly; to share in abundantly), establish the sense of an integrated completion of identity following upon a transfer of one or more qualities contained in *vāc*. This is supported by the final instance of *sam-√kr* to be addressed here, which occurs in the opening paragraph of ŚāṅkhĀ and attests to the potential for revelatory language to be transferred via the mechanism of recitation to other bodies – outside the immediate calendrical context of the Mahāvratā, and outside the circle of its initiated knowers – to equally potent effect.

*prajāpatir vai samvatsaras tasyaiṣa ātmā yan mahāvratam tasmād enat
parasmai na śamṣen net sarveṣāṃ bhūtānām ātmānaṃ parasmin dadhānīty
atho indrasyaṣa ātmā yan mahāvratam tasmād enat parasmai na śamṣen
ned indrasyātmānaṃ parasmin dadhānīty atho yam evaitam ṛimayaṃ
yajurmayam sāmamayaṃ puruṣam samskurvanti tasyaiṣa ātmā yan
mahāvratam tasmād enat parasmai na śamṣen net sarveṣāṃ chandasām
ātmānaṃ parasmin dadhānīti kāmam tu sattriṇām hotā śamset pitre
vācāryāya vātmane haivāsya tac chastaṃ bhavati ātmānaiva tad yajñam
samardhayati / ŚāṅkhĀ 1.1*

Prajāpati is the year; the Mahāvratā is his body (*ātman*); therefore one should not recite it for another in case they place in the other the body of all beings. Now, the Mahāvratā is the body of Indra; therefore one should not recite it for another in case they place in the other the body of Indra. Now, the Mahāvratā is the body of this person (*puruṣa*) made of the *ṛc*, *yajur*, and *sāman* verses who they complete (*samskurvanti*); therefore one should not recite it for another in case they place in the other the body of all the metres. One may freely recite it, however, as the *hotṛ* of the Sattrins or for one's father or teacher – the recitation is really for oneself alone, and with oneself alone does one fulfil (*sam-√rdh*) the sacrifice.

AitĀ 5.3.3 specifies the restriction, stating that “one who is uninitiated should not recite the Mahāvratā, not when there is no fire [/altar], not for another, not when it has not been a year” (*nādīkṣito mahāvratam śaṁsen nānagnau na parasmai nāsaṁvatsara ity*), thus instituting a circumference of programmatic control around the practice of transformation by ritualized self-immersion in positively valued forces.

How might these rules limit the sphere of recitation, and how might their metaphysical significance be interpreted? Such restrictions on recitation seem to relate in content and objective to the lists of spatial, temporal, and physical regulations on Vedic study, *svādhyāya*, that began to emerge around the time of the earliest Āraṇyakas³³³; and, although not identifying itself explicitly in terms of *anadhyāya*, the remainder of the Aitareyan passage comprises a detailed exposition of exactly such regulations, which it introduces as the “*dharma* of Vedic study” (AitĀ 5.3.3: *athātaḥ svādhyāyadharmam vyākhyāsyāmaḥ*). Yet the absence of in-depth research into the metaphysical underpinnings of these restrictions and the earliness of this AitĀ passage relative to the Dharmasāstra codes in which most examples of *anadhyāya* occur make it difficult to comment on the restrictions pertaining to the Mahāvratā with any surety. There are certain observations, however, that are of considerable relevance. It is my sentiment that the interpretation of these rules, in Olivelle’s words (following Mary Douglas), as expressing a “concern for purity” that “translates into a concern for maintaining the integrity of boundaries, both physical and spatial, which in turn relates to a concern for maintaining social boundaries”³³⁴ fails to comprehensively account for the perceived involvement between the permeability of bodily boundaries and the potency of language that is evidenced elsewhere outside of the śāstric tradition. There is good reason to accept that the regulations outlined in the AitĀ correspond to the ŚāṅkhĀ’s description of the Mahāvratā’s linguistic encodings, its *bandhus*, being placed (*√dhā*) in the body of one exposed to it, as opposed to

³³³ Olivelle (2006: 306 n.4) records that the earliest reference to *anadhyāya* that he has been able to trace is TĀ 2.15: *tasya vā etasya yajñasya dvāv anadhyāyau yad ātmāsucir yad deśaḥ /*

³³⁴ Olivelle *ibid.*: 319.

being motivated by the socialized norms that are characteristic of the Dharmaśāstras which Olivelle bases his study upon.³³⁵

A second point may be raised with respect to the often-discussed matter of the extent to which Brahmanical culture sought to ritually and discursively control the uncontrollable forces at play in the cosmos. As Alexis Sanderson argues in his study “Purity and Power Among the Brahmins of Kashmir,” the veridical threat of forced or non-volitional possession influenced the centrality of behavioral norms followed by orthodox Brahmins, because “(any) relaxation of the inhibition and self-control that this conformity required was seen as opening up a chink in the armour [*sic*] of the integral self through which these ever alert and terrible powers of the excluded could enter and possess...”³³⁶ It is clear that the dynamics of possession relate to the phenomenon of powerful language, a disembodied entity, crossing bodily boundaries in ways that are not always desirable or intended, as is suggested in ŚāṅkhĀ 1.1 above. Sanderson’s study thus significantly connects patterns of closely managed personal behavior to the religious and cultural environment in which the “orthodox anthropologies” he draws upon were composed, demonstrating an acknowledgement of possession implicit in the exegetical defenses against it.³³⁷

What Sanderson’s study does not address, however, are the ways in which the dynamics of possession were controlled without being erased from either the formal rituals of *yajña* or the worldly practices in which Brahmins participated, and continue to participate. This point is decisively established in the literary research and ethnographic and anthropological field-work conducted by Mary Hancock, Frederick Smith, and Glenn Yocum among others³³⁸; and it is not nullified by the observation that over time, by means of “exercising programmatic control, which occurred as a result of the elimination of its unstructured, noninstitutionalized, unpredictable, and (thus) frightening aspects, possession was

³³⁵ Olivelle cites *śāṅkhā*, which he translates “concern or scrupulousity”, as a socialized psychological impetus for maintaining ritual boundaries (ibid.: 321).

³³⁶ Sanderson 1985: 200.

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ Hancock 1999, F. Smith 2006a, Yocum 1973; cf. Flood 1996: 161, 220-21.

drained of its spontaneity.”³³⁹ What is salient about this distinction for our purposes is that, albeit moderated through textualization, the basic sensibility behind the array of practices presented in the Ṛgvedic Āraṇyakas – from the Mahāvratā to the production of amulets – is consistently that of transactions between disembodiment and embodiment. Such rites with their open utilization of the central mechanisms of possession and identity-construction are a window onto mid- to late Vedic religious culture that precedes the intellectual rewriting of powerful language through the śāstric encoding of *anadhyāya* within normativizing socio-political frames of *dharma*, the Mīmāṃsakas’ delimiting vision of *vidhi*, and the Vedāntins’ benign unacknowledgement of powers and experiential realities aside from *brahman*.

In light of the requirements of *sam-√kṛ* and the lexicon examined in Chapter 3, these observations indicate that the restrictions around recitation presented by the AitĀ and ŚāṅkhĀ are aimed at preventing unintended transactions of *vāc* from taking place, thus protecting the subject by directing *vāc*’s movements in ways that are predictable, for revealed in the formulations of the *Ṛgveda*. While these Āraṇyakas are not unique in the attention paid to *vāc*, whose willful spontaneity is the crux of a number of Vedic myths³⁴⁰, this quality of their focus derives its particular contours from a specific association between the recitative (and therefore enactive) dimensions of language, Prajāpati’s cosmic emission, and a definition of *saṃhitā* that is explicated in the corresponding *Samhitopaniṣad* portions of each text. This short account sits within a subset of Prajāpati myths occurring in the Brāhmaṇas that are united by their shared concern with his initially failed attempts at emitting the cosmos, resulting in a creation that is either excessively undifferentiated or deficiently so, incestuous and cannibalistic or fragmented and incohesive.³⁴¹ These myths – which Brian K. Smith argues are not cosmogonies, for what is produced from Prajāpati’s body is not cosmos but

³³⁹ F. Smith 2006a: 385. Again, as much can be seen in Śaṅkara’s selective approach to commenting on the Upaniṣads, particularly his non-inclusion of the rites that make up the greater portion of the KṣU; see Cohen 2008: 139-141.

³⁴⁰ See the discussions of *vāc* and the exploits and self-descriptions of the goddess Vāc in Carpenter 1994 and Patton 1990.

³⁴¹ See B. Smith 1998: 54-69 and 1985: 73-75.

chaos³⁴² – establish both the pull toward dissolution and the potential for devourment as inborn conditions and identify ritual as the sole requisite means of effecting integration (*saṃhitā*), the foundation of the *ātman*'s ontological viability. In the words of the Aitareyan telling of this narrative:

atha hāsmā etat kṛṣṇahārīto vāgbrāhmaṇam ivopodāharati / prajāpatiḥ prajāḥ sṛṣṭvā vyaśraṃsata saṃvatsaraḥ / sa chandobhir ātmānaṃ samadadhāt yac chandobhir ātmānaṃ samadadhāt tasmāt saṃhitā / tasyai vā etasyai saṃhitāyai ṇakāro balaṃ ṣakāraḥ prāṇa ātmā / sa yo haitau ṇakāraṣakārāv anusamhitam ṛco veda sabalāṃ saprāṇāṃ saṃhitāṃ vedāyuṣyam iti vidyāt / AitĀ 3.2.6

Now Kṛṣṇahārīta sets forth this sacred utterance on *vāc*: When he had emitted the creatures, Prajāpati, the year, fell apart. He put himself together by means of the metres; since he put himself together by means of the metres, it is the *Samhitā* (“put together,” “union”). For the purpose of attaining this, that state of union (*saṃhitā*), the sound *ṇa* is strength, the sound *ṣa* is *prāṇa*, the self. One who knows these, the sounds *ṇa* and *ṣa*, the *ṛcs* as they are put together (*anusaṃhitam*), knows the *Samhitā* with its strength and with its *prāṇa* – one should know it to be for the sake of life.

It is ultimately of note that this sacred and therefore revelatory utterance (*brāhmaṇa*) is specified as addressing not Prajāpati, but *vāc*. Just as Prajāpati, who takes the form of a person, falls apart as though limb from limb (*vi-√śraṃs*) into constituent pieces only to use the sonic and grammatical integration of *chandas* to put the pieces of himself together (*sam-√dhā*) in a realization of wholeness, so his myths and *mantras* are employed in rites of life (*saṃskāras*) that are undergone by human subjects to instantiate and maintain transformations of personhood “for the sake of life” (*āyuṣya*). Broadly speaking, these rites amount to the achievement of enhanced degrees of personal completeness as appropriate to *varṇa*, passage (initiation, marriage, and so on), and calendrical cycles (harvest, etc.) and in accordance with textual authorization; furthermore, they again implicate the phenomenon referred to by Flood as “entextualization,” in which “the body itself functions as a representation of tradition, text and cosmos.”³⁴³ Tantamount to the latter point are the numerous documented instances of the employment of *sam-√kr* to indicate the process of Prajāpati's

³⁴² B. Smith 1985: 73.

³⁴³ Flood 2006: 5.

completion and its product, an intersection which once more extends to human embodied experience in the form of *saṃskāras*.³⁴⁴ Unlike Brian Smith, however, who sees in these myths a legitimization of the “audacious assumption of enormous power on the part of certain human beings”³⁴⁵ (an hermeneutic touchstone which more or less begins and ends his analysis of Sanskrit’s worldly significance), Jan Gonda’s meticulous investigation of the popular employments of Prajāpati materials in the domestic rituals detailed by the Gṛhyasūtras and Pariśiṣṭhas and in the magical rites outlined in lesser-known Vedic texts such as the *Kauṣikasūtra*³⁴⁶ leads him to argue for a significant connection between the processes and transformations identified in these myths, the nuances of creation and preservation contained in the literal rendering of Prajāpati’s name as “Lord of Creatures,” and people’s real-world concerns.³⁴⁷ Gonda’s assertion of the practical validity of these connections is bolstered by more recent scholarship on the continuities between the Agnicayana, classed as a classical *śrauta* ritual, and the Brahmanical and Tantric practices of bodily divinization such as *nyāsa* and *bhūtaśuddhi* that fall within the category of obligatory daily rites (*nitya*).³⁴⁸ It is noteworthy that Gonda’s sympathetic defense, although grounded in the minutiae of literary analysis and conducted without reference to ethnographic data, stands up to comparison with the findings of a wide range of cross-disciplinary research on Brahmanic and Hindu culture – a point which draws attention to the value of a literal reading of the term *saṃhita* as it is employed in these passages.

A parallel version of Prajāpati’s cosmic emission and subsequent collapse occurs at ŚāṅkhĀ 8.10-11 together with a more detailed account of its repercussions for human soteriology. The initial stages in the sequence are almost identical to that presented in the AitĀ: according to a sacred utterance (*brāhmaṇa*) set forth by a teacher named Kṛtsnaṃ Hārīta, Prajāpati emitted the

³⁴⁴ For a thorough survey of these instances, refer to B. Smith 1998: 91-104 (esp. 101) and 1985: 76, 79-81.

³⁴⁵ B. Smith 1998: 69.

³⁴⁶ Cf. Jamison and Witzel 1992: 50.

³⁴⁷ Gonda 1982: 137-140, 147-148.

³⁴⁸ See Malamoud 2002: 26 and Flood 2000; also F. Smith’s statement that (2006: 378): “*nyāsa* may be viewed as a simplified and dramatic reduction of the *agnicayana*... This reassembled organic whole is considered as nothing less than the creator god Prajāpati himself, who contains within him the entire cosmos.”

creatures, became distressed (*vi-√tamṣ*, a verb reminiscent of being dispersed or cast about as a net), and put himself together by means of *chandas* (*chandobhir ātmānaṃ samadadhat*), all leading to the identification of *saṃhitā*. For the purpose of attaining this *saṃhitā*, continues Kṛtsnaṃ Hārīta, “the sound *ṇa* is strength, the sound *ṣa* is *prāṇa*, and the self is the union” (*ṇakāro balaṃ ṣakāraḥ prāṇa ātmā saṃhitā*); and moreover, this entry into the changed state or condition in which the minute (or subtle, *viz.* sounds, self, strength, breath, etc.) are blended is manifestly indicated by the parts of the gross physical body, from hair to nails, and presumably including everything in between (*athaiṣā kṣudramiśrāvīkṛtis tāni nakhāni romāṇi vyañjanānīti*).³⁴⁹ And thus it is that the *Samhitā*, known with the sounds *ṇa* and *ṣa*, and its *ṛcs* learned in accordance with their phonetic integration, is for the sake of life (*āyuṣya*).

However, this integrative and therefore life-giving quality of *saṃhita* is not exclusive to the *Samhitā*-as-canon, but rather appears as a potential latent in speech: “*vāc* is history and lore and whatever else is made of sacred [speech/power]; so should one study it and know it also to be thus [for the sake of life]” (*vāg itihāsapurāṇaṃ yac cānyat kiṃcid brahmīkṛty evādhīyīta tad apy evam eva vidyāt*).³⁵⁰ In this case, the suggestion that *saṃhitā* – a total integration resulting in a viable self (*ātman*) – can be achieved in a variety of ways that always involve *vāc* but do not always require the *Samhitā* is evidenced by the continuation of the passage itself. After relaying Kṛtsnaṃ Hārīta’s *brāhmaṇa*, ŚāṅkhĀ 8.11 consecutively presents the teachings of Hrasva Māṇḍūkeya and Sthavira Śākalya, each of whom asserts that the sounds *ṇa* and *ṣa* (and, by extension, their affect) can be obtained (*upa-√āp*) through the study of the *ṛcs* and also by pronouncing the teachings or by learning the recitations belonging to their respective lineages. Following this, the passage adduces a fourth teaching on

³⁴⁹ Note the similar reference to hair and nails in ŚāṅkhĀ 6.20, where the intelligent self (i.e., *prāṇa*) is said to pervade the bodily self “up to the hair, up to the nails” even as a razor is placed in a razor-case or fire in a fire-receptacle: *tad yathā kṣuraḥ kṣuradhāne vopahito viśvaṃbharo vā viśvaṃbharakulāya evam evaiṣa prajñātmedaṃ śarīram ātmānam anupraviṣṭha ā lomabhya ā nakhebhyas... //*

³⁵⁰ To assume that the reference to *itihāsapurāṇa* marks a later insertion into the text of the ŚāṅkhĀ may be overly simplistic; see Patton’s discussion of the same in the *Bṛhaddevatā* (1996: 203-206). Keith (1908: 56 n.2) does not attempt translation of this phrase, rather directing the reader to Geldner (1889: 290 [vol.1]) and Oertel (1899: 446-447).

saṃhitā, which is attributed to the Kāvāṣeyas and appears superficially to contend with the preceding assertions:

etad dha sma vai tad vidvāṃsa āhuḥ kāvaṣeyāḥ kim arthā vyaṃ yakṣyāmahe kim arthā vyaṃ adhyedhyāmahe vāci hi prāṇaṃ juhmaḥ prāṇe vācaṃ yo hy eva prabhavaḥ sa evāpyaya iti // ŚāṅkhĀ 8.11

Yet while knowing exactly this [preceding teaching on *saṃhitā*], the Kāvāṣeyas say: “For what reasons should we sacrifice? For what reasons should we learn (the *ṛcs*) off by heart? We pour as an offering *prāṇa* in speech, speech in *prāṇa* – the source is the absorbing.

Although it would be easy to interpret this final teaching as indicative of the typically Upaniṣadic interiorization of sacrificial performance, and therefore as a later addition to the surrounding text and challenge to its somewhat more conservative focus on Vedic study, the movement inwards is not inconsistent with the picture of *saṃhitā* that arises from a reading of the passage a whole in accordance with the form in which it has been preserved and transmitted according to oral tradition. Beyond this, the emphasis on *vāc* as existing in mutuality with *prāṇa* and as a substance of sacrificial oblation, and as therefore not contained within the parameters of a narrowly conceived canon of scripture, is wholly anticipated by the identification of *vāc* with all *brahman*-revealing teachings and its inclusion among the minute elements from whose blending a physically and phenomenally integrated *ātman* is achieved. In turn, ŚāṅkhĀ 8.11 states, all of these teachings are *saṃhitās*, and subject to the restrictions on recitation fitting of Vedic learning.³⁵¹

A wealth of examples accrues rapidly once this extended context of *saṃhitā* is established as a double-vision in which language and the person intersect in accordance with overarching cultural intuitions about embodiment and its permeability, within a cosmos that not only permits but insists that, through knowing, one must become a living expression of reality. Thus: “Earth is the preceding form, heaven the latter form, wind the union (*saṃhitā*)...speech is

³⁵¹ The final line of the passage reads: *tā etāḥ saṃhitā nānantevāsine brūyan nāsaṃvatsaravāsine nābrahmacāriṇe nāvedavide nāpravaktra ity ācāryā ity ācāryāḥ //*

the preceding, mind the latter, *prāṇa* the union” (ŚāṅkhĀ 7.2, AitĀ 3.1.1³⁵²); “The union (*saṃhitā*) is put together (*saṃdhīyate*) with the form of the Bṛhat and Rathantara [Samans]...speech, indeed, is the form of the Rathantara, *prāṇa* of the Bṛhat; by both, by speech and by *prāṇa*, the union is put together” (AitĀ 3.1.6³⁵³); “This union joins together the [divisions of] time; time joins together movement, stopping, and rest; by movement, stopping, and rest all this (*idaṃ sarvaṃ*) is joined...the past is the preceding, the future is the latter, the present is the union (ŚāṅkhĀ 7.20³⁵⁴); “Intelligence is the preceding, faith the latter, action the union, truth the uniter” (ŚāṅkhĀ 7.18³⁵⁵); “Speech is the union...by speech are the Vedas united, by speech the meters; by speech one unites friends, by speech all beings; therefore all this is speech” (AitĀ 3.1.6³⁵⁶). It is *saṃhitā* as a personally realized phenomenon and transaction between identities, and thence between states, that draws forth the underlying coherence of these passages and their grouping within the Aitareyan and Śāṅkhāyanan *Samhitopaniṣads*; and no less significant is the fact that when viewed through this lens, such statements reiterate the functional role of *bandhus* in the achievement of *sam-√kr*.

Yet it is in a remarkably different passage of the *Samhitopaniṣad*, AitĀ 3.2.4, that the gripping impetus for integration is most fully brought to light.³⁵⁷ Whilst characterized by a marked shift in style and content, this passage makes an important contribution to our understanding of *saṃhitā* by describing in detail change occurring at the antipode of self-transformation: “We have said that this incorporeal intelligent self and that sun are one (*ekam*). When they are lost...one should know his self (*ātman*) is gone and he will not live for long.” The verb employed here is *vi-√hā* (to relinquish, quit, abandon) which frequently appears

³⁵² Pāṭhak 1922: 26: *prthivī pūrvarūpaṃ dyaur uttararūpaṃ vāyuḥ saṃhitā...vāk pūrvarūpaṃ mana uttararūpaṃ prāṇaḥ saṃhitā*; the identical text occurs in AitĀ 3.1.1 (Phaḍke 1898: 184, 187).

³⁵³ Phaḍke 1898: 199: *brhadrathamtarayo rūpeṇa saṃhitā saṃdhīyate...vāg vai rathamtarasya rūpaṃ prāṇo bṛhata ubhabhyām u khalu saṃhitā saṃdhīyate vācā ca prāṇena ca /*

³⁵⁴ *saiṣā saṃhitaitān kālān saṃdadhāti kālo gatinivṛttisthitīḥ saṃdadhāti gatinivṛttisthitibhir idam sarvaṃ saṃdhīyat[e]...bhūtaṃ pūrvarūpaṃ bhaviṣyad uttararūpaṃ bhavat saṃhiteti...//* The numbering between editions of the ŚāṅkhĀ varies slightly. Pāṭhak 1922: 31 gives this passage as 7.20; Keith 1908 as 7.21. This difference between editions is consistent across ŚāṅkhĀ 7.

³⁵⁵ Pāṭhak 1922: 30: *prajñā pūrvarūpaṃ śraddhottararūpaṃ karma saṃhitā satyam saṃdhānam /*

³⁵⁶ Phaḍke 1898: 202: *vācā vai vedaḥ saṃdhīyante vācā chandāṃsi vācā mitrāṇi saṃdadhati vācā sarvāṇi bhūtāny aho vāg evedaṃ sarvaṃ /*

³⁵⁷ Corresponding to ŚāṅkhĀ 8.6-7, 11.3-4.

in Sanskrit literature together with references to living embodiment, such as *śarīra* (the decaying body) and *prāṇa* (the vital breaths), in the sense of abandoning the body or life, and thus “to die.” A sense of physical abandonment can be traced in this passage; however, rather than indicating the departure of one’s identity from their mortal body in a heaven-bound merger, *vi-√hā* in this case carries the inverse sense of the individual *ātman* and celestial sun – and therefore the stabilizing effect of this identification – becoming lost. This phenomenon is not framed as a natural progression or stage in life. On the contrary, the loss of self and sun is conceptually related to a directly preceding description of one – intertextually, a priest – for whom the Vedas are not productive but “milked-dry” (*dugdhadoha*) and who has no share (*bhāga*) in the knowledge he has received via the oral tradition (*anūkta*) for “he does not know the path of the rightly performed [ritual].”³⁵⁸ The reference is to ṚV 10.71.6, an hymn addressing “the mastery of sacred speech (*vāc*),” and a verse presenting a scenario in which “the uncooperative priest betrays the speech he perceives because only the priests together can perform the [soma] rite.”³⁵⁹ In this context, then, *vi-√hā* carries the sense of a strongly physical loss of the truth of identity, conceived as a decisive and disintegrative reaction to wrongful engagement with *vāc* that, firstly, unhinges one from the cosmological relationship between the embodied *ātman* and celestial sun, and, secondly, mortally disrupts the collocation of deities, body, and *ātman* that lies behind the functioning of the *puruṣa*.³⁶⁰

The unsustainable physiological malfunction that here follows upon *vi-√hā* equates to a devastating rupture of self-containment (or the functional state that arises when the deities and *ātman* have become established, *pratiṣṭha*, in their associated corporeal abodes, *āyatana*) that is evidenced both by the odors and

³⁵⁸ The opening line of AitĀ 3.2.4: *dugdhadohā asya vedā bhavanti na tasyānūkte bhāgo ’sti na veda sukṛtasya pathānam iti /*

³⁵⁹ The text goes on to quote ṚV 10.71.6: *yas tityāja sacividaṃ sukhāyaṃ na tasya vācy api bhāgo asti [sic] / yadīm śṛnotv alakaṃ śṛnoti na hi pra veda sukṛtasya panthām iti //* See Jamison and Brereton 2014: 1496-1498 (vol. 3).

³⁶⁰ Cf. variations at ŚāṅkhĀ 8.6: “His learning possesses no share of speech – so it is said. Therefore he should not recite this day for another, nor lay the fire, nor celebrate with the Mahāvratā in case he becomes detached from his self” (*nāsyānūkte vāco bhāgo astīty eva tad āha tan na parasmā etad ahaḥ śamsen nāgniṃ cinyān na mahāvratena stuyān ned ātmano ’pihīyā*).

winds that begin to break through the subject's bodily boundaries, moving from the inside out, and also by the misperception of external phenomena whose stimuli travel in the opposite direction, from the outside in. In response to these transformations, the subject is instructed to silently recite (\sqrt{jap}) a prescribed selection of verses from the *R̥gveda*, which I provide in their recent translation by Jamison and Brereton. While not returning the subject to a state of living integration and abundance in the world, these recitations aim to counteract the soteriological repercussions of $vi-\sqrt{hā}$ by means of ensuring entry into immortality after death. In order to achieve this goal, the subject must induce four consecutive movements or transactions between themselves, the divine realms, and revelatory language: (1) purification of their person through the coded characteristics of a variety of gods; (2) a re-establishment of one's poetic productions as substances fit for offering, achieved through the suggested identification between the origins of poetic inspiration and the primordial birth of the divine; (3) the harnessing of this re-invigorated speech to provide Soma, and hence the fluid of immortality (*amṛtā*), with the power to transport the speaker from the ritual sphere to heaven; and (4) the reconnection of the subject with the sun, "the highest light" and truth of their identity. In the words of Ait̄ 3.2.4:

*sa yaś cāyam aśarīraḥ prajñātmā yaś cāsāv āditya ekam etad ity avocāma /
tau yatra vihīyete candramā ivādityo drśyate na raśmayah prādur bhavanti
lohinī dyaur bhavati yathā mañjiṣṭhā vyastah pāyuh kākakulāyagandhikam
asya śiro vāyati sampareto 'syātmā na ciram iva jīviṣyatīti vidyāt / sa yat
karaṇīyaṃ manyate tat kurvīta yad anti yac ca dūraka iti sapta japed
ādīpratnasya retasa ity ekā yatra brahmā pavamāneti ṣaḥ ud vayaṃ
tamasas parīty ekā /*

We have said that this incorporeal intelligent self and that sun are one (*ekam*). When they are lost, the sun looks like the moon (and its) rays do not manifest, the sky turns red as madder, the rectum is prolapsed [/the wind is not retained?], his head emits the smell of a raven's nest, and he should know his self (*ātman*) is gone and he will not live for long. He should do what he considers needs doing; [following that] he should silently recite the seven verses –

*What peril nearby and what at a little distance finds me here –
o self-purifying one, smash that away.*

*The one who purifies himself through our filter today, the limitless
one*

*who is the purifier, let him purify us.
 The filter that is stretched out here within your flame, o Agni,
 and the sacred formulation – with that purify us.
 Your filter of flames, Agni – with that purify us;
 with the impulsions of the sacred formulations purify us.
 With both, god Savitar, with the filter and with your impulsion
 purify me all about.
 With the three purify us – you, god Savitar, with your greatest
 (impulsions), you, Soma, through your greatest domains,
 and you, Agni, with your skills.
 Let the godly folk purify me; let the Vasus purify me with insight.
 O All Gods, purify me; o Jātavedas, purify me.³⁶¹*

the single verse –

*Just after that they see the dawning light of the age-old semen,
 when it is kindled far beyond heaven.³⁶²*

the six verses –

*Where, o self-purifying one, the formulator, making metrical speech
 along with the pressing stone, makes himself great on soma,
 generating joy with soma –
 - O drop, flow around for Indra.
 Where the inexhaustible light is, in which world the sun is placed,
 in that one place me, o self-purifying one, in the immoral,
 imperishable world.
 - O drop, flow around for Indra.
 Where the son of Vivasvant is king, where there is a ladder down
 from heaven,
 where those youthfully exuberant waters are, there make me
 immortal.
 - O drop, flow around for Indra.
 Where one can move following one's desire in the three-vaulted,
 three-heavened
 (place) of heaven,
 where there are worlds filled with light, there make me
 immortal.
 - O drop, flow around for Indra.
 Where there are desires and yearnings, where the upper surface of
 the coppery one
 [=Sun and soma?] is,*

³⁶¹ RV 9.67.21-27; translation by Jamison and Brereton 2014: 1297 (vol. 3). I present their translation in italics for the sake of clarity. Whereas the AitĀ gives only the opening line or *pratīka* of the first verse of each set of recitations in accordance with common practice, I give the translation of the entire set of verses indicated by the text for the convenience of modern readers.

³⁶² RV 8.6.30; Jamison and Brereton 2014: 1040 (vol. 2, see their notes on p. 1037).

where there is independence and satisfaction, there make me immortal.

- O drop, flow around for Indra.

*Where joys and delights, elations and exaltations dwell,
where the desires of desire are obtained, there make me immortal.*

- O drop, flow around for Indra.³⁶³

[and] the single verse –

*Looking up from the darkness to the higher light, we
have come up to the Sun, god among the gods, the highest
light.³⁶⁴*

Interestingly, all of the verses prescribed for silent recitation are characterized by the particularity of their respective embedding within entire hymns of the *Ṛgveda*, being either self-contained units, enigmatic transitions or intermediate points between more clearly defined groups of material, or climactic omphalos verses. This contrast is even further reiterated by the designations of the hymns themselves, of which the first and third are dedicated to Soma Pavamāna, the second to Indra, and the third to Sūrya (the sun), thus resonating predictably with the themes of the Mahāvratā to which these *Ṛgvedic* texts often return; how the seemingly patterned contrast of the verses, and the obvious and thematic associations of the hymns, are to be interpreted with respect to the *Samhitopaniṣad* is not, however, clear. The passage then turns to an enumeration of sensory hallucinations (*pratyakṣadarśana*) and dreams (*svapna*), both classical portents of affliction, that are suggestive of a frightening ordeal in which the previously described rupturing of one's personal boundaries causes corresponding and severe alterations in their experienced environment.

*athāpi yatra chidra ivādityo drśyate rathanābhir ivābhikhyāyeta chidrām
vā chāyām paśyet tad apy evam eva vidyāt / athāpy ādarśe vodake vā
jihmaśirasam vāśirasam vātmānam paśyed viparyaste vā kanyāke jihmena
vā drśyeyātām tad apy evam eva vidyāt / athāpy apidhāyākṣiṇī upekṣeta tad
yathā baṭarakāṇi sampatantīva drśyante tāni yadā na paśyet tad apy evam
eva vidyāt / athāpy apidhāya karṇā upaśṛṇyāt sa eṣo agner iva prajvalato*

³⁶³ RV 9.113.6-11; Jamison and Brereton 2014: 1365, esp. notes on 1364 (vol. 3). They identify vv.6-7 as the omphalos verses that provide “a dramatic transition from the poet's description of the preparation of the soma in the first half of the hymn to a vision of heaven” (ibid.).

³⁶⁴ RV 1.50.10; Jamison and Brereton 2014: 163 (vol. 1).

rathasyevopabdis taṃ yadā na śr̥ṇyāt tad apy evam eva vidyāt / athāpi yathā nīlam ivāgnir dr̥śyate yathā mayūragrīvāmeghe vā vidyutaṃ paśyen meghe vā vidyutaṃ na paśyen mahāmeghe vā marīcīr iva paśyeta tad apy evam eva vidyāt / athāpi yatra bhūmiṃ jvalantīm iva paśyeta tad apy evam eva vidyāt / iti pratyakṣadarśanāni / athā svapnāḥ / puruṣaṃ kṛṣṇaṃ kṛṣṇadantaṃ paśyati sa enaṃ hanti varāha enaṃ hanti markāta enam āskandayaty āśu vāyur enaṃ pravahati suvarṇaṃ khāditvāpagirati madhv aśnāti bisāni bhakṣayaty ekapuṇḍarīkaṃ dhārayati kharair varāhair yuktair yāti kṛṣṇāṃ dhenuṃ kṛṣṇavatsāṃ naladamālī dakṣiṇāmukho vrājayati / sa yady eteṣāṃ kiñcit paśyed upoṣya pāyasaṃ sthālīpākaṃ śrapayitvā rātrīsūktena pratyrcaṃ hutvānyenānnena brāhmaṇān bhojayitvā caruṃ svayaṃ prāśnīyāt / sa yo 'to 'sruto 'gato 'mato 'nato 'dr̥ṣṭo 'vijñāto 'nādiṣṭaḥ śrotā mantā draṣṭādeṣṭā ghoṣṭā vijñātā prajñātā sarveṣāṃ bhūtānām antarapurusaḥ sa ma ātmeti vidyāt // AitĀ 3.2.4

Next, if the sun looks split (and) appears like the nave of a chariot-wheel, or he sees his shadow is split, he should know that it indeed is the case [that his self is gone and he will not live for long]. Next, if he sees himself in a mirror or in water with a crooked head or with no head, or if his pupils appear inverted or crooked, he should know that it indeed is so. Next, he should cover his eyes and look: circular lines of light that seem to fall together are visible; when he does not see them, he should know that it indeed is so. Next, he should cover his ears and listen: there is a sound such as of a blazing fire or of a chariot; when he does not hear it, he should know that it indeed is so. Next, when fire appears blue as a peacock's neck, or if he sees lightning in a cloudless sky or does not see lightning in a cloudy sky, or sees what looks like glittering specks in a great cloud, he should know that it indeed is so. Next, when he sees the earth as if burning, he should know that it indeed is so. These are the [signs] perceived with the senses. Now, the dreams. He sees a black man with black teeth, he kills him; a boar kills him; a monkey leaps at him; a fast wind blows him along; he chews on gold and spits it out; he eats honey; he devours stalks; he carries a single lotus; he travels with a team of asses and boars; wearing a garland of red hibiscuses, he drives a black cow with a black calf toward the south. If he should see any of these, then, having kept a fast, he should heat the milk for the offering of cooked milk and grain (i.e., the *sthālīpāka*) and offer it with the Rātrī hymn – an offering to a verse – and feed the Brahmans with other food and eat the oblation himself. He should know that the person within all beings who is not heard, not reached, not thought, not seen, not discerned, not determined, (but is) the hearer, the thinker, the seer, the determiner, the sounder, the discerner (and) the knower is his self (*ātman*).

Although the utilization of *sūktas* or parts thereof for the purpose of warding off nightmares and neutralizing their negative influences was established practice by the time of the Gṛhyasūtras, this passage appears to be unique in its deployment

of the Rātrī hymn (to the goddess Night, ṚV 10.127) together with the production of a *sthālīpāka*, “the most characteristic of domestic offerings.”³⁶⁵ Contrary to the approach taken by Gonda, whose comments on this passage are restricted to the thematic link between nightmares and Night, I contend that the prescribed dedication of a *sthālīpāka* to Rātrī here is not so simplistic.³⁶⁶ It needs to be mentioned, as Gonda fails to, that this sole hymn to Rātrī in the *Ṛgveda* is concerned neither with a formless and frightening dark nor asks protection from ill-dreams and omens, but describes an immortal goddess smeared over with stars at whose journey all creatures settle down and who repels the dark by sending forth her sister, Dawn.³⁶⁷ As such, while this hymn evokes the night as a space of comfort and rest, its poetic function anticipates the arrival of the dawn, and therefore the return of the sun, indicating that the goal towards which its recitation is directed is the restoration of one’s true identity in death for the sake of a heavenly afterlife. This is in contrast to the activity of counteracting nightmares, which would return the subject to a state of lived well-being but may not have any direct effect on the attainment of post-mortem immortality.

To this may be added that the considerable intertextual documentation of *sthālīpākas* consistently points to the understanding that the combined involvement of the deity to whom the offering is dedicated and the family- or community-members who would typically share consumption of the oblation creates an extended relationship between the one who makes the offering and the event precipitating it. The *sthālīpāka* thus functions as a transactional strategy in which the simultaneous pouring-forth of hymn and oblation generates a substantial identification with the objectives brought into manifest form through language; this substance is then incorporated into the bodily identities of those who consume the food.³⁶⁸ Here again, given the context of the event and the focus of the hymn, it is unsurprising that the consumption of the *caru* (oblation) is reserved for the subject and not shared with the Brahmans present, which would instead make the transaction constitutive of their affective and relational identity

³⁶⁵ Gonda 1980: 180.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.: 272-273.

³⁶⁷ Jamison and Brereton 2014: 1605 (vol. 3).

³⁶⁸ Marriott 1976: 114. See also his notes on “transactional strategies” (ibid.: 136).

in the world. Finally, it is noteworthy that while text from the Saṃhitā can evidently be used to adapt such a rite to the personalized end of regaining – or perhaps substituting for – the identity (*ekam*) of the *ātman* and the sun, and do so even in spite of the person’s previously improper engagement with *vāc*, this passage remains suggestively silent on the matter of their union (*saṃhitā*) with offspring, livestock, and all other measures of a fruitful integration with life. Whether or not the loss of this embodied union is intended and irreversible, or considered to have been substantially accounted for by the transformations encoded in the recitations and other ritual undertakings, it bespeaks a crucial addition to the approach to revelation taken here: it is the affective identification of living vitality and language, rather than any canonical proscription of magical practices, that provides the sufficient basis of *saṃhitā* in the cultural system of these Āraṇyakas.

As has already been mentioned, this chapter concludes by briefly considering two examples of magical practice, both drawn from the ŚāṅkhĀ. I have selected these particular instances because they lucidly demonstrate the working characteristics of a multiply constituted identity and its moulding into a state of integrated personhood, yet what they also demonstrate herein are the characteristics that have led to their deploring, simple neglect, or epistemological invalidation by Classical Sanskrit *paṇḍitas* and modern Indologists alike. It may be argued that this is because they resist interpretation in light of a pure and dispassionate self, uninformed by the body and the *puruṣa*’s involvement with the world, and iterating an eclipse of persona by submersion in an ultimate and idealized form. However, it is for these reasons of resistance and challenge that magical rites provide a valuable terrain in which to test the interpretations we have been exploring, in particular, the postulation that language is substantially involved in the life-long processes of shaping a soteriologically viable and advanced state of being, and that these changes at the level of embodiment, with its interiorization and expressivity, are proximate to and even complement the transformative dimensions of Vedic revelation.

In their tendency to expose cultural intuitions about the body’s place in identity formation (upon which they in no small part depend), these rites show

that knowing is invariably physical and creative, not only perceptual and psychological, and that even the realization of an immutable and unadulterated self (*ātman*, *prāṇa*) does not alter the fact of the *puruṣa*'s continued identification with the macrocosm and thence its vulnerability to external influences. Rather, in keeping with the tenor of these texts, it follows that such knowledge informs and enhances a spiritual practitioner's capacity for self-preservation until the time of a natural or desired death, and ability to identify effective means of achieving precisely this aim.³⁶⁹ These considerations rightly bring us to question the coherence of attempting to retain a boundary between religion and magic as the distinguishing features of the latter blur in relation to their ameliorative provision for the textually authorized, and traditionally acknowledged, former ends.

Let us turn then to these examples of magical practice, ŚāṅkhĀ 11.5-8 and 4.7-8 (in order of discussion). Both sequences are characterized by their portrayal of the *puruṣa* as a multivocal and shifting collocation of deities that abide within the internal spaces of the corporeal body and each of which has a coded identity that quite literally extends from a substantially subtle physiological function to a macrocosmic phenomenon, thus agreeing with the creation narratives that punctuate this Āraṇyaka. Whilst remaining within the boundaries of coherence set by the same cosmological archetypes, the forward-momentum of these sequences revolves around their description of how to incorporate additional substance-codes into oneself, thus volitionally instigating changes in physical identity that preserve and extend life. These changes provide for ongoing soteriological practices of self-transformation by means of controlling the entry and exit of substance-codes from the person.

The first example, ŚāṅkhĀ 11.5-8, corresponds broadly to the latter part of the account of bodily malfunction and ritual directives found just above in AitĀ 3.2.4, but with the significant variation that this description of sensory hallucinations and dreams directly follows an account of the *puruṣa*'s creation by Prajāpati (11.1-2, translated in Chapter Three) and is introduced as the “visions of the year” that will be seen by that archetypal *puruṣa* when they are approaching

³⁶⁹ Shulman and Stroumsa 2002: 15.

death.³⁷⁰ While the text still continues to prescribe the offering of a *sthālīpāka*, this shift in context informs a corresponding change in the recitation, which now consists of four pre-patterned stages of increasing complexity. The subject, and the text here seems to make simultaneous reference to both “this” person and the archetypal *puruṣa*, must first recite a short and repeated sequence as they pour libations of ghee onto the offering of cooked grain. This first stage of the recitation exactly mirrors the process of primordial creation in its detailing of the establishment of each macrocosmic phenomenon in its respective physiological, temperamental, or anatomical locus, including *brahman* in the *ātman* (ŚāṅkhĀ 11.5³⁷¹). The second recitation follows the same sequence, but in an extended form that locates each deity in the heart and the heart in the self. Thus:

vāci me 'gniḥ pratiṣṭhito vāg hṛdaye hṛdayam ātmani tat satyaṃ devānāṃ māham akāmo mariṣyāmy annavān annādo bhūyāsaṃ svāhā / ŚāṅkhĀ 11.6

Fire is established in my speech, my speech in my heart, my heart in my self; this is the truth of the deities. I will not die against my will; I will be rich in food, an eater of food – *svāhā!*

The formula is repeated for each deity; while undertaking this and the following recitations the subject is instructed to consume portions (*śeṣa*) of the *sthālīpāka*. It might be effectively argued that as a strategy of transfer, this initial pair of recitations confines each deity to increasingly deep, subtle, and multiply embedded loci within the person as a means of preventing their departure in a reversal of the phenomenology of death. This procedure both preserves the distinct integrity of each deity, and integrates them within the concentric yet singular spaces of body, heart, and *ātman*.

Having in this way stabilized the *puruṣa* by ensuring the ongoing contribution of each deity, the circuitous liquid offering of language into the *sthālīpāka*, and *sthālīpāka* into the body, now turns to the incorporation of other substance-codes into the person’s developing ontological state. While the third and fourth stages in the recitation find no parallels in the AitĀ, the methodology

³⁷⁰ ŚāṅkhĀ 11.3: *athāyaṃ puruṣaḥ preṣyan purā saṃvatsarāt saṃvatsarasya dṛṣṭīḥ paśyati...* / The sensory hallucinations and dreams described vary only very slightly in detail from those presented by the AitĀ.

³⁷¹ The formula is: X(loc.) *me* Y(nom.) *pratiṣṭhita- svāhā*, “Y is established in my X, *svāhā!*”

is familiar and draws upon the comprehensive interrelationships that weave throughout reality. The third recitation (ŚāṅkhĀ 11.7) utilizes *bandhus* to establish linkages between two hierarchies of increasing subtlety and comprehensiveness of identity: on one hand, an enumeration of natural phenomena that follow a vertical movement from the coarse and inanimate (stone, iron, copper, lead, silver, gold), through the person and their animated involvement in the life-world (food, satiation [*tr̥pti*]), to the ethereal formations of midspace (the firmament [*nāka*], Bṛhaspati, *brahman*, Prajāpati), and finally to the Vedas. Providing the other half of this X = Y *bandhu* formation is, on the other hand, a hierarchy of *chandās* that moves from the ubiquitous ritual metres of *jagatī* and *triṣṭubh* to the utterly comprehensive, and utterly condensed, Savitṛ or Gāyatrī mantra – the “metre of all the Vedas.” The fourth recitation presents an extended form of these identifications, in which they are specifically bound to the overarching aim of self-preservation by means of the quality of firmness (*sthira*) that at once is intrinsic to their own substance-coding and works to the enhancement and promotion of the deities’ establishment (*pratiṣṭha*) in the person:

*aśmeva sthiro vasāni jāgatena cchandāsā puruṣo maṇiḥ prāṇaḥ sūtram
annam granthis tad granthim udgrathnāmy annakāmo mṛtyave brāhmaṇam
api sarvām āyur aśītyāyuṣmān māham akāmo mariṣyāmy annavān annādo
bhūyāsaṃ svāhā / ŚāṅkhĀ 11.8*

I remain as firm as stone with the *jagatī* metre! Man is the jewel, breath the thread, food the knot – the knot that I, the desirer of food, tie as a *brāhmaṇa* [against] death. Full of life, I attain a whole life. I will not die against my will; I will be rich in food, an eater of food – *svāhā!*

Approached from the perspective of transaction, the repetition that generates the body of the recitations prescribed in ŚāṅkhĀ 11.5-8 demonstrates the transferral of each substance and its telescoping relationships via the harnessing of language’s richly communicative capacities for manifestation and fundamental affinity with oblation.³⁷² Despite their introduction of new material – that is, material of non-Vedic origin that differs in focus and style from the Ṛgvedic

³⁷² See Sandess 2010.

sūktas we have elsewhere seen employed in ritual transformations – these recitations are arguably Vedic in their cogent application of teachings about the truth of identity.

The passages comprising our second example of magical practice, ŚāṅkhĀ 4.7-8, better known as *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad* [KṣU] 2.7-8, cast these tensions and continuities into still higher relief. This is in large part a matter of contextualization rather than content: the formal inclusion of these passages in the *Kauṣītaki* is, like innumerable similar instances within this corpus of texts, at odds with what many scholars have come to expect of the true metaphysical purpose of the Upaniṣads and the subtle communicative function of their language. Generally speaking, the focus on ritualized activities (categorically, *karman*) and worldly well-being do not sit comfortably within the purview of an argument for the primacy of knowledge and its acquisition through an ascetic disengagement with one’s conventionally experienced identity. Nonetheless, the first of the passages translated here describes three acts of veneration (*upāsana*), which are attributed to Sarvajit (“All-Conquering”) Kauṣītaki, the teacher from whom this branch of the *Ṛgveda* takes its name, and which again possess an aura of domestic ritual in their deployment of liquid and linguistic offerings to establish an intersection between the person and a natural course of events:

athātaḥ sarvajitaḥ kauṣītakes trīṇy upāsanaṇi bhavanti sarvajid dha sma kauṣītakir udyantam ādityam upatiṣṭhate yajñopavītaṃ dhṛtvodakam ānīya triḥ prasicyodakapātraṃ vargo ’si pāpmānaṃ me vṛndhīty etayaivāvṛtā madhye santam udvargo ’si pāpmānaṃ ma udvṛndhīty etayaivāvṛtāstaṃ yantaṃ saṃvargo ’si pāpmānaṃ me saṃvṛndhīti tad yad ahorātrābhyāṃ pāpaṃ karoti saṃ tad vṛṅkte tatho evaivaṃ vidvān etayaivāvṛtādityam upatiṣṭhate yad ahorātrābhyāṃ pāpaṃ karoti saṃ tad vṛṅkte // ŚāṅkhĀ 4.7³⁷³

Next, there are the three acts of veneration belonging to Sarvajit Kauṣītaki. Now, this is how Sarvajit Kauṣītaki would venerate the rising sun: wearing the sacred garment in the sacrificial manner and having fetched water, he would pour it into a water-pot three times, saying, “You are the one that removes! Remove my sin!” He would venerate the midday sun in exactly this way, saying, “You are the one who tears out! Tear out my sin!” He would venerate the setting sun in exactly this way, saying, “You are the one

³⁷³ Sanskrit text from Pāthak 1922. Dev’s 1980 edition shows minor variations in the reading of the text, as does the corresponding text of the KṣU presented by Olivelle 1988.

who devours! Devour my sin!” And the sun did devour any sin he had committed by day or night. Likewise, when a man knows this and venerates the sun in exactly this way, it devours the sin he commits by day or night.

Although these rites of veneration do not lay out a discursively esoteric teaching on the truth of identity, they at the very least enact one by pressing the inherited cause-and-effect model of *karman* into the soteriological framework of a transformative knowledge that consists of hidden relationships and, on these same terms, locates authority in individuals. The metaphysical diversity of the Upaniṣads aside, the efficacy with which Kauṣītaki’s speech is depicted presupposes a determinative state of realization. Such a presupposition of knowledge can again be seen in the directly following paragraph, an instance in which the actions described compare favorably with early Upaniṣadic teachings, particularly those relating rebirth and identity to the moon, its function as a door through the heavenly vault, and the critical role of linguistically formulated knowledge in a person’s attainment of the worlds beyond the cycles of time and space.³⁷⁴ These teachings confer a logical center to the circumstances and procedures described in ŚāṅkhĀ 4.8, cohering in spite of (or better, perhaps, in relation to) this passage’s emphatic vocalization of the desire for offspring, livestock, and the prolonging of life – all living proofs of knowledge that were to become archetypal of the ritualists’ interests, but which undeniably share conceptual ground with the understanding that *retas*, semen, and thence all life stems from the seasons of the lunar calendar.

*atha māsi māsy amāvāsyāyāṃ vṛttāyāṃ paścāc candramasaṃ dr̥śyamānam
upatiṣṭhetaitayaivāvṛtā haritatr̥ṇe vā pratyasya yan me susamid dhṛdayaṃ
divi candramasi śṛitaṃ manye ’haṃ māṃ tad vidvāṃsaṃ māhaṃ putryam
aghaṃ rudam iti na hy asmāt pūrvāḥ prajāḥ praitīti
jātuputrasyāthājātuputrasyāpyāyasva sametu te saṃ te payāṃsi samuyantu
vājā yamādityā aṃśum āpyāyantīty etās tisra ṛco japitvā māsmākaṃ
prāṇena prajāyā paśubhir āpyāyayiṣṭhā yo ’smān dveṣṭi yaṃ ca vayaṃ
dviṣmas tasya prāṇena prajāyā paśubhir āpyāyayasvety aindrīm āvṛtam
āvarta ādityasyāvṛtam anvāvarta iti dakṣiṇaṃ bāhum anvāvartate // ŚāṅkhĀ
4.8*

³⁷⁴ Cf. Citra Gāṅgyāni’s famous teaching to Āruṇi on rebirth and the afterlife (ŚāṅkhĀ 3.2 = KṣU 1.2). The same teaching occurs at BĀU 6.2.1-15 and CU 10.1-3 with the significant addition that two paths are described, of the gods and of the ancestors. For a literary comparison of these redactions, see Olivelle 1999.

Now, every month on the night of the turning of the new moon, one should worship the moon as it becomes visible in the west using exactly the same procedure, or one should throw two blades of green grass at it, saying,

My heart, a fine kindling stick,
is placed in heaven in the moon –
this, I do believe, I know.
May I not have to weep
for my children's suffering!

His children, surely, will not die before him. This is for a man who has a son. Now as for a man who does not have a son [there are the verses]:

Swell up, O Soma!
May virility
gather in you from all sides!
be there
at the gathering of power!
May juices and powers,
May virile energies,
gather in you, who crush the enemies;
As you swell, O Soma, to immortality,
you capture in the sky the highest glory.³⁷⁵
That tiny drop,
the Ādityas make to swell;
That imperishable drop,
the imperishable ones drink;
With that drop,
may king Varuṇa and Brhaspati,
the guardian gods of the world,
make us swell!³⁷⁶

Having silently recited these three *ṛcs*, he then says, “Do not swell yourself up by means of our *prāṇa*, offspring, and livestock! Swell yourself up with the *prāṇa*, offspring, and livestock of one who hates us and whom we hate!” He then turns a full circle toward his right, saying, “I turn the way of Indra! I turn the way of the sun!”

The magical dimensions of this passage are standard: alongside other occasions when this heavenly body is of unusual colour or irregular appearance, the *amāvāsya* night when the new moon is “dwelling at home” is a preferred time for

³⁷⁵ The verses are RV 1.91.16 and 18. The translation of these verses is Olivelle's (1998: 339, also 588 n.8).

³⁷⁶ TS 2.3.5.3.

the performance of magic; the rites exhibit personal power and self-invested interests that benefit only the speaker, and which, to a greater or lesser degree, implicate the conscious harming of others; and, unlike *yajña* in which the seamless flow of *vāc* and sacrificial materials draws in the presence of gods and other divine elements in the poetic creation of the event, but also unlike the domestic *grhya* rites in which the same affinities are utilized in response to naturally occurring events and their auspicious potential, the offerings prescribed here and in the preceding examples are characterized by their intention to constrain worldly phenomena and thereby control their personal impact.³⁷⁷

With reference to other qualitative measures of magic, the dimensions just listed cannot sufficiently answer the question of whether these practices represent unorthodox transgressions of moral and religious boundaries, for they do not in any sense mark a supernatural departure from the organismic reality of the *Āraṇyakas*' revelation, the reality within which all possible expressions of being, and therefore all transformations of identity, must naturally occur. This too holds for their powerful employments of language. As a practical matter, then, the inherent violability of an unbound self that is both feeder and food (*attā ha vā ādyo bhavati*; AitĀ 2.1.2) and fundamentally subject to the “dictates and mutations of the local environment”³⁷⁸ points to the usefulness – indeed, the necessity – of ritual mechanisms that safeguard the person and, most importantly, ensure their continued transformation. Additionally, a fact that still does not result in any definite moral fibre: these mechanisms, no less than the formally celebrated discernment of hidden connections that underscores the *Samhitās* and *Upaniṣads*, entails a perceptual shift in the reality understood and experienced by the human subject. This shift, compelled by *vāc*, whose capacity for expression extends as far as *brahman*, is nothing other than a rupturing of the boundaries that limit self-awareness, to the ends of unleashing the truth of an identity whose very boundlessness manifests through the composite interplays of personhood and the subtle category-fusions beheld in the attainment of integration and completeness, where embodiment must become the revelation of revelation itself.

³⁷⁷ Gonda 1980: 244-245, 249-251.

³⁷⁸ F. Smith 2006a: 262.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusions

Sanskrit and the Textuality of the Ṛgvedic Āraṇyakas

Given the amount of space already dedicated to discussions of a theoretical timbre, this study does not conclude by offering a summation of either the dynamics that characterize language and embodiment in the Ṛgvedic Āraṇyakas or the methods used to retrieve these, except to say that it should by now be clear that there exist viable alternatives to the currently prevailing approaches to these texts. The fact that these alternatives build upon established methodologies by marking a shift in orientation that openly challenges the establishment of our common assumptions whilst intentionally avoiding a disruptive impact on emic perspectives is, I contend, a strength of this embodied approach to language and a necessary step in the direction of better understanding the existence claims and soteriological transformations that at once comprise these materials and are anticipated as their result by indigenous participants. This, simply, is a matter of open-ended dialogue between emic and etic standpoints, such that advances in the scientific understanding of human biology and neurophysiological adaptation provoke an engaged response from those working in the humanities, thus together providing an informed basis on which to adapt literary interpretation and analysis to the underlying idea of language seen at work in the particularities of traditional expression and text formation. To the extent that this idea of language is not previously specified, but conceived to be grounded in perceptions of personhood and to reflect fundamental understandings about reality, it applies equally to both sides of the emic–etic divide and significantly allows the unique cultural inflections of texts to be preserved at the same time as satisfying modern analytical desiderata. Further, in the context of the present study, it takes into positive account the pressures increasingly incumbent upon scholars of Vedic

texts to respond to evidence, amassed in recent decades, that not only indicates a convergence of the folk and Sanskritic in early Brahmanical culture, but which, in suggesting that interpretations based on the notion of a seizure of enunciative control through Sanskrit are more appropriately applied to later orthodox thinkers than to an indiscriminate demographic of “ritualists,” has also highlighted the reifying involvement of modern academic theory in the way mid-Vedic responses to the Veda have been popularly represented. These considerations and revisions, their hermeneutic foundations and analytical procedures, have been sufficiently addressed.

Instead, let us turn to the wider implications of the embodied model of language suggested by *saṃskṛta*. If the variety of nuanced expressions and ritualized employments of language demonstrated in the Ṛgvedic Āraṇyakas attests commonly to a creative intersection between permeable embodiment and *vāc*, it is then apposite to re-raise the issue of a Brahmanical inculcation of control executed over the centuries by means of a practical and ideological deployment of Sanskrit invoking an orthodox imaginaire of authoritative textuality. This is not to ask about a forced marginalization of Prakritic, regional, and vernacular practices, a topic that is not dealt with explicitly or otherwise in these primary sources, but rather to ask whether the restrictions articulated in the AitĀ and ŚāṅkhĀ can be seen to prefigure the concerns with exclusivity and authority that later come to demarcate intellectual or formally codified Brahmanism in its literary and ritual or performative aspects. What these texts reveal is a concern with control which, unlike that conceptualized by Pollock and others, arises entirely from the model of the body as “a locus for external forces.”³⁷⁹ As seen, these deities, their externalizing emission from the cosmic progenitor, and subsequent disembodiment, extended codification, and disruptive volatility, altogether provide the substantial basis for both self-integration and its devastating collapse – the expressive extremes of identity and personal malleability at which the metaphysical equivalence of knowing, being, and doing is most fully disclosed. These movements are in all cases guided, circumscribed, and personally realized through *vāc*; and I propose that, if a case were to be made

³⁷⁹ F. Smith 2006a: 581.

for a Brahmanical concern with control as expressed in these texts, the potential for a disfiguring disruption at the intersection between person and cosmos – the *puruṣa* that falls apart, dries out, is abandoned by the identity of self and sun – should provide the immediate terms and context for ensuing analysis.

This, of course, entails a subjectivity that sits emphatically at odds with the major discourses that color the śāstric expression of Sanskritic culture: the Pūrvamīmāṃsākas' erasure of all human involvement or influence from the revelation of the Veda, which, circuitously, drives an argument against the possibility of any soteriological potential inherent in other languages; the Vedāntins' depiction of an inviolate transcendent *ātman* and corresponding denial of relationality, whether in terms of ritual technology, ontological veridicality, or transformations in awareness (e.g., *brahmānubhava*); and the widespread appropriation of Sāṃkhyan cosmogony as an explanatory paradigm in service of theological visions of an absolute God. If anything, however, the popular acceptance of these metaphysical and epistemological paradigms as representative of Brahmanical practice *in practice* renders the acknowledgement of their limitations, exceptions, and variable negotiation a matter of pressing significance. It is thus germane to recall Frederick Smith's observation that possession – a phenomenon which in its relationality is at the very least proximate to (but at most is arguably identifiable with) the Ṛgvedic Āraṇyakas' depiction of personhood and its formation – can be found existing in close juxtaposition with other domains of ritual and ritualized concerns.³⁸⁰ This is evidenced ethnographically, through the participation of Brahmins in non-Brahmanical festivals and rites involving the induction of possession states, noted by Knipe among others, and likewise through the adherence to modes of linguistic conduct intended to prevent against drawing the attention of the “evil eye,” to quote Appadurai, who further attributes both “Vedic” or “Indo-Aryan” and “Dravidian” clusters of meaning to these verbal behaviors.³⁸¹ Of significance to the present discussion is the fact that such ethnographic data receives textual support from distinctly orthodox Brahmanical sources. According to Sanderson's study of

³⁸⁰ Ibid.: 592. See also Hancock 1999; Ram 2013.

³⁸¹ Knipe 2005; Appadurai 1990.

Mīmāṃsāka, Vedāntic, and Vaiṣṇava materials with respect to the opposed phenomena of purity and pollution as the primary considerations informing behavioral conformity among Kashmiri Brahmins, the retreat to the normativity of pure consciousness, and hence the idealized depersonalization of self-identity, equates to a strategic – and textually enjoined – maintenance of one’s socially privileged position in the form of a direct response to the “dark chaos of possibilities” that arise from a turbid world with its potent external forces.³⁸²

While, in Sanderson’s analysis, it is the formlessness of pure consciousness that ensures its veridicality, such safeguarding against the dramatically polluting impact of personal invasion by these disembodied substances affirms rather than denies their affective reality despite their contradiction of “the metaphysics of autonomy and responsibility.”³⁸³ Such instances of Brahmanical interaction with the vulnerabilities and potential of a self without fixed boundaries, whether through its implicit acknowledgement as a threat requiring an enjoined response or through its active ritual embrace as an instrument of volitionally induced shifts in awareness and the experiencing of one’s self, cannot be fully explained by the dialogic processes involved in Sanskritization. Although it is undeniable that these too have had a role to play, the evidence points further towards the ongoing historical significance of permeable embodiment and its extended cosmological dynamics, both among localized practices on the ground and at the rarified heights of Sanskritic discourse. Here again, it is probable that inherited assumptions about the singularity of the orthodox Brahmanical concern with the ultimacy of an unchanging and transcendent *ātman* and denial of different models of personhood have considerably limited the scholarly engagement with *śāstras* and other officially recognized texts by placing pre-established dictates around the varieties of evidence searched for in these materials.

Returning now to the Ṛgvedic Āraṇyakas, it is not difficult to see the active mutuality between permeable embodiment and the interrelationship of *vāc* and *prāṇa*, which together establish the experience of the *puruṣa*’s porosity, the

³⁸² Sanderson 1985: 193.

³⁸³ Ibid.: 200.

entry (*pra-√viś*) and exit (*ud-√kram*) of its constitutive deities, in paradigmatic and fundamentally accessible physiological terms. Although the exact order of precedence in the relationship between *vāc*, *prāṇa*, and *manas*, the mind, is not something that the accounts held in these texts allow us to establish with certainty, this does not undermine the fact that *vāc* is the key to a phenomenological understanding of the *Āraṇyakas* – indeed, this unresolvable dilemma with its remarkably subtle shading between epistemology and ontology figures as a major point of disagreement among the teachings on integration that are presented in both versions of the *Samhitopaniṣad*.³⁸⁴ The linkages of identity that grammar veridically manifests intersect with the openness of embodiment to introduce changes in personal constitution that, firstly, challenge the gap between discourse and practice by vitalizing these *Āraṇyakas*, in their full affectivity, as active instances of self-transformation, and secondly demonstrate the expansiveness of *vāc* as a matrix that encompasses form and formlessness, corporeality and non-corporeality, subjectivity and objectivity, and thence continuity between person and cosmos. This is clearly to be distinguished from the negative treatments of *nāma-rūpa*, name and form, as an epistemological problematic by South Asian analytical traditions, in which the exactitude suggested by words and worldly appearances presents a perceptual obstacle to the discernment of truth through their implied identification of substantial qualities and actual phenomena. In accordance with the ontological demands of a self, an *ātman* or *jīva*, whose absolute transcendence defies language in both its referentiality and substantiality, the objects, states, and conditions communicated by words are merely conventional, with their supposed reality being contingent upon the ignorant and uninformed perceptions that beleaguer the spiritually uncultivated subject. Much the same is also concluded following the demands of the absence of any self (*anātman*) that could be assigned to the individually unique and mutating collocation of *skandhas*, personality constituents, that informs the experience of selfhood, but which ultimately shows the referential constancy of language to be void of reality. By contrast, the state of having

³⁸⁴ This is not limited to the *Ṛgvedic* *Āraṇyakas*; see Shulman's (2012: 11-12) discussion of mind and speech – and their existence prior to their appearance – in the cosmogony of *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 7.4.11.

become *nāmāyatta*, bound to or dependent upon names, is esteemed by the AitĀ as the condition in which the archetypal poets kept free from the conventional strictures and confusions that limit the ordinary engagement with language, and instead were satiated in the revealed.³⁸⁵

It would thus be a mistake to assume that the textuality of the R̥gvedic Āraṇyakas either reinforces a controlling need for infinitesimal categorization or presents only the discursive component of a teaching to the opposite effect, that is, in isolation from the practical transformations of awareness and experience that are its necessary source and counterpart. When seen in light of the expansiveness of the person as an open locus for external forces, the grammatical and poetic complexity of these texts fractures such categorization – including the separation of discursive knowledge from its practical affect – in a verbal and therefore enactive dismantling of the limitations that inhere in the vision of oneself as autonomously isolated from the world and which restrict the ability of the self to transform as a result.³⁸⁶ The acts of categorical distinction typically predicated as the *modus operandi* of language, that impose sharp boundaries between the subject and the multiplicity of objects perceived in the world as an unavoidable dimension of linguistic referentiality, do not survive the impact of *vāc* on the delicate fabric of personal identity. To cite Shulman and Stroumsa, this is one way in which the performance of these Āraṇyakas indicates a mode of self-transformation that is “largely a form of healing that removes a block” by revealing, through the structures of the self as a whole, the linkages of identity that embed the experience of knowing one’s personal multivocality.³⁸⁷ It is this multivocality, the evidence of the texts suggests, that allows one to continually adapt or transform in accordance with the changes in their environment – the movements of sun and moon, the death of a father, the arrival of a new year, the malignant action of enemies, and so on – as demanded by the larger soteriological endeavor of preserving the living state of integration that is prerequisite to the attainment of post-mortem immortality. Rather than pointing beyond itself to an

³⁸⁵ See the verses in AitĀ 2.3.8, especially 3: *yad vāca om iti yac ca neti / yac cāsyāḥ krūraṃ yad u colbaṇiṣṇu / tad viyūyā kavayo anvavindan / nāmāyattā samatṛpyaṅ chrute ’dhi //*

³⁸⁶ Shulman and Stroumsa 2002: 13-15.

³⁸⁷ Ibid.: 15.

ineffable reality that transcends the divisions introduced by its referential function, the spiritually adept engagement of language reaches deeply into itself, exploding such perceptual limitations through its embodiment of the silent dynamics that describe manifestation as a constantly mutating and potentially unlimited edifice of relational linkages in identity.

The multivalency of *vāc* thus reveals the truth of compound personhood precisely by acting upon its structures, as from without, while simultaneously arising from within them as a component of identity that is at once familiar and foreign. In this way, however, the extensiveness of its expression – its rupture of the boundaries that limit self-transformation, and replacement of them with the experience of liberating openness – encodes the threat of disintegration. The urgency of this dimension of *vāc* and its grounding in the deep structures of Vedic revelation itself have gone largely unrecognized by those working in the academic study of the *Āraṇyakas*, despite its notable degree of overlap with other, considerably well-documented concerns belonging to the Brahmanical ritual sphere.³⁸⁸ This may in part be due to the latter's conceptual relegation to the rather shadowy category of mythology; nonetheless, the tension of a revelation that threatens to cast the very identity it reveals into dysfunctional chaos helps to co-ordinate the effort to define the *Āraṇyakas* as a textual genre.

Thus, some general observations are in order. As the opening sequence of the *ŚāṅkhĀ* explicitly cautions its reciters, the transformations induced by the recitations that variously comprise these texts may take place volitionally or non-volitionally, for they lie within *vāc* and not with the intention of the speaker alone. This understanding of the dangers of disregarding the power of revelatory language – which is inclusive of, but not restricted to, the hymns of the Veda – reveals a significant point of continuity that is not only shared by the *AitĀ* and *ŚāṅkhĀ*, but can be traced beneath the multifariousness of their contents, from their careful attentiveness to the requirements of *vinīyoga* and *bandhu* that regulate the transformative effect of the recitation of the Mahāvratā, to their detailed descriptions of collapse and physiological malfunctioning, and

³⁸⁸ In particular, I note the tendency of the altar, the sacrifice, and other ritual elements and essences to run away and *Vāc*'s predilection towards uncontrollability. For example, see Carpenter 1994; Jamison 1991, 1996: 40, 149; Malamoud 1989: 86-90.

prescription of rites that actively harness the power of *vāc* to restore self-integration, transfer ritual essences between bodies, and deflect the potentially devastating impact of imprecations.³⁸⁹ This concern, or rather nexus of concerns bearing upon the tense and potentially volatile intersection between revelation and embodied integration is not restricted to practices that have been determinatively codified by their formal inclusion in Brahmanical ritual texts, but extends to practices and teachings that have been conceived of by scholars as the earmarks of a strictly distinct Upaniṣadic culture in which such complexity and its repercussions for the valuation of the senses were reconstructed negatively in accordance with emerging systems of thought about *saṃsāra* and liberation therefrom. It was argued in Chapter 3 that the absolute terms in which such characterizations are frequently cast can be traced back to an intersection of influence between the Vedāntins' inheritance of epistemological principles from Pūrvamīmāṃsā, namely, the denial of subjectivity as a valid means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*), and the commensurate undervaluing of the *puruṣa* by modern and medieval scholars, as in the case of Sāyaṇa whose reading of these materials is heavily influenced by the leading Vedāntic commentaries.³⁹⁰ However, the notion of an encounter between language and the *puruṣa*'s compound identity is not entirely absent from these materials; its soteriological significance and relationship to the antipodes of integration and disintegration are apparent in the determinative influence of *upaniṣads*, *ahaṅkāras*, *mahāvākyas*, and other verbalized modes of self-revelation upon whether the speaker gains entry to heaven and subsequent immortality or, breaking again into their constitutive elements, are reabsorbed into the cycle of *saṃsāra*.³⁹¹ As in their chronological antecedents, it is clear that the attainments predicated upon knowledge require

³⁸⁹ The discussion of the ineffectuality of rebukes and imprecations against one who integrated by virtue of their recitation of the Saṃhitā is particularly telling in this respect; see for example AitĀ 3.1.3-4.

³⁹⁰ Galewicz 2009: 175-185.

³⁹¹ This is most clearly articulated in Citra Gāṅgyāyani's teaching on the repeated tests of knowledge encountered by the deceased (ŚāṅkhĀ 3). However, the determinative influence of such dialogues is also apparent in the accounts of Viśvāmitra's entry to the world of Indra (AitĀ 2.2.3, ŚāṅkhĀ 1.6) and the debate between Bālāki and Ajātaśatru (ŚāṅkhĀ 6). The AitĀ's (2.1.7) correlation of the qualities of Varuṇa's undecaying world with the soteriological attainments of the knower are also of note in this connection.

subtle insight into *vāc* as the reservoir of revelations about the truth of identity, manifested in the ability to harness its internal dynamics.

Additionally, it must be added that these scenarios suggest the transformations induced by *vāc*, whether positive or negative, are not restricted to an internal domain of pre-objective experience, but are publicly observable and communally affective occurrences with external expressions that can be identified by others in either their aberrant symptomology or authoritative command of attention and respect. This raises the apposite issue of how these transformations' personal and social reverberations bring substance to the spatial restrictions that are repeatedly invoked in definition of the *Āraṇyakas*' textuality. In most if not all cases, this emerging phenomenology of *vāc* requires that the accounts contained in these materials need to be read rather more literally than the poetic figures of English would typically have us assume, while their structured sonic textures require more analytical attention than can be captured by either translation alone or the modern methods of philology and linguistics in their present state of ideological separation from a positivistic and culture-specific engagement with religious language.

This is to suggest the possibility that the *Ṛgvedic* *Āraṇyakas*' concern with the transfiguring impact of revelatory language – its dismantling of the subject into the chaos of innumerable fragmentary linkages – and their resultant depiction of integration as the fundamental prerequisite to the attainment of a personal identity, point to the existence of linguistic affects that may indeed be retrievable if a detailed analysis of their verbal surfaces were to be undertaken. While the demands of such a project extend far beyond the capacity of the present study, the understanding of *vāc* and embodiment that has emerged from the examinations conducted here contains ample space for adaptation and fine-tuning in accordance with future findings. Unfortunately, however, it is not advisable to extrapolate a definition of the *Āraṇyakas* as a formal corpus from the observations offered throughout these chapters. As indicated early in this study, and as most Indologists would be well aware, the lack of availability of editions, absence of reliable or complete translations, and lack of comprehensive information about textual parallels in the wider Vedic corpus present an outstanding difficulty that

would need to be addressed before the details needed for further research could begin to be amassed. The significance of such work cannot be overestimated, for this absence of sheer raw data is matched by an equivalent lacuna in our understanding of the Veda as revelation and the early religious culture of the Brahmins.

In light of the observations offered throughout this study, the central insight revealed through examination of the Ṛgvedic Āraṇyakas is that if our assumptions about Sanskrit as a language are not reconsidered in relation to *vāc*, the difficulties that occlude the understanding of these materials are not liable to go away. As the transformations of personhood entailed by becoming *saṃskṛta* draw embodiment ever closer to living revelation, Sanskrit comes to bear strongly upon Vedic textuality, not through association, but as an affect whose desirability can only be made sense of in the context of the body's porosity and the internal horizons of sensory awareness. The fact that this challenges familiar preconceptions about language and the stability of its arbitrary relationship to reality is, I contend, a necessary development, for it highlights the inherited orthodoxies that enter the fray when methods of cross-cultural literary interpretation are constructed without due consideration for the contingencies and limitations of the tools we take for granted. As has been demonstrated, the convergence entailed by an admission of Vedic models of relationality into modern ways of working with texts is not only possible, but relatively simple, if first we are willing to accept as reality the fact of embodied identity and the open-endedness of its construction in response to the appearance of stimuli, both predictable and unexpected, in our internal and external environments. The challenge, then, is not simply to maintain the beliefs of a religious culture, but to push deeply into the question of how we bring our own values into scholarly work and allow them to colour the way we understand texts, as Clooney reminds us.³⁹² Yet here too, perhaps, the issue remains the desire to reach out to the Vedic revelation from the untouched space of an autonomous self.

³⁹² Clooney 1996: xviii.

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