From the Necessary Poetry of Lucio Saffaro to a Ternary Language for Ray Johnson (Radiant Language)

by Stefano Zorzanello

The following text is deliberately and more than obviously inspired by Lucio Saffaro's essay, "I linguaggi necessari" published in *Parol – quaderni d'arte* n.5, Bologna, March 1989. This small contribution of mine seeks to pay homage to the prophetic aura achieved through the combinatory techniques emanating fragrances of arcane, inevitable bonds. Rather than a simple act of plagiarism (Plagiarism is necessary, progress involves it (G.Debord)) this is (I believe) a quite faithful, albeit limited, application of the Saffarian processes aimed at the construction of a Ternary Language of the Radiant kind for pure, though never sufficient, celebratory ends.

to Raggio Fi' Giovanni, Oryctolagus cuniculus, Mammifero Lagomorfo: alle Luci del Faro Osa F.

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Given a three-letter English word that has a meaning, for example "RAY". Recompose the word "RAY" arranging its letters in their alphabetic sequence and we obtain "ARY". Define the "alphabetic sequence" as the sequence of whole positive numbers obtained by numbering, beginning with 1, the component letters in alphabetical order. The word "ARY" will therefore be an anagram of the **word** "RAY" with the particularity of being characterized by the "alphabetic sequence" "123" since the letter "A" is the first to occur in alphabetic order among the letters that compose it, thus "R" will be the second and "Y" the third. We could also say that "ARY" constitutes the base anagram, or Anagram 1, of all the possible permutations of a word composed of the letters A, R, Y. The possible permutations correspond to the value of 3! (3 factorial, 3*2*1 = 6) that applied to the letters A, R, Y give origin to the sequences-permutations and the relative anagrams shown in Table 1. The set of the anagrams without repetition (in which each letter appears just once) can be understood as the set of the positional combinations or permutations of the alphabetic sequence, such permutations can also be said to be "positional sequences".

Table 1

Anagram-permutation 1	123	ARY
Anagram-permutation 2	132	AYR
Anagram-permutation 3	213	RAY
Anagram-permutation 4	231	RYA
Anagram-permutation 5	312	YAR
Anagram-permutation 6	321	YRA

Referring to the "alphabetic" formula of the base anagram (1), we obtain by permutation the positional sequence of the word "RAY" as third anagram "213". If we were to consider the hypothesis of building a micro-lexis conceived as a sub-language of the English language, the terms of which constituted only by substantives formed of three-letter words, and in which the meanings are defined by relations of specification, we could apply a principle of substitution among the letters – to be specified subsequently – to establish some "necessary" relations between terms that would give rise to new meanings of the terms themselves. We could call this language, composed of nominal syntagms constituted of positional sequences deriving from differing alphabetic sequences, with the requirement of having only three letters, "Ternary Language", or in this case for us "Radiant Language" as homage to the word "RAY". In our case we will apply the non-word permutations deriving from the anagrammatic variants of the same word, but to the subset of the three-letter words isolated from the lexis of the English language. Due to the above-mentioned limit of three letters, the micro-lexis will nevertheless maintain the characteristic of possessing only six terms, number deriving from the factorial development of the value 3. In our case, in order to identify the terms of our Radiant Language of the Ternary type, we consider the following terms:

ART (123), BOX (132), RAY (213), SUN (231), WAR (312), ROD (321)

The terms chosen use all the possible permutational positions without repetition, thus forming a "ternary lexis", which albeit concise and "stringed" can constitute the basis for the following composition:

By the Rod of the Art of the War, put the Sun Ray into a Box.

By rights one can easily object that a lexis is not a language, however, it can found the conceptual basis of a language. We can in any case push ourselves further by observing some linguistic relations between definition and specification. For example, we could ask ourselves which secret relation – but forever before the eyes of everyone – there exists between the word "RAY" and the word, again a three-letter word, "SUN"? And what new meaning or semantics can be attributed to the expression "the RAY of the SUN"? According to the principle of substitution, previously only enunciated, we could exemplify the operation in this way: given the terms and their positional sequences, RAY(213), SUN(231), and the expression "Ray of Sun" understood as specification of a function *f*(x) known as "*f* of x", or as function "*f" applied to "*x" (in which x is understood as a variable), taking for granted that this is not the multiplication of two numbers but involves redefining by substitution the positional relationship between two sequences of numbers and letters, the function "Ray of Sun" "SUN*RAY" = "RAY*SUN" = RAY(SUN) = 213 (231) can be developed composing a new positional sequence (therefore a new term, whose association will determine a new meaning) deriving it from the elements of the complement of specification. Therefore, RAY (213) becomes the operator, SUN (231) becomes the variable that will assume a new value thanks to the operator, substituting in the order the respective numbers

RAY (213), SUN (231), 213 (231) = 321

To close the definition it will be sufficient at this point to find a word, within the subset limited to three-letter words of the English language, which responds to the positional sequence "321". For example, the word ROD (321) responds perfectly to this purpose.

A useful instrument for easily realizing this type of language is the creation of the following Table 2 in which all of (or a good number of) the terms responding to the relative positional sequences are ordered in alphabetical order.

Table 2

123	ACT	AIM	ALL	ART	BEE	BET	BIT	CEL	DOG	DOT	EEL	ELM	EGO	EMU	EXY	FOX	GUY	HIT	HOD	HUT	IMU	IVY
	KOS	LOX	NEF	NIL	NOW																	
132	AGE	AID	ALE	APE	ARC	ARM	ASH	AXE	BOA	BOP	BOX	BOY	BRA	BRO	BUS	ELK	EYE	FIG	GUT	JON	JUL	NUN
	PIX																					
213	BAG	BAR	BAY	CAB	CAN	CAP	CAR	CAT	COP	DAD	DAM	DAT	DIN	EAR	FAN	FAX	GAL	GAP	GAS	GEL	GIN	HAM
	HAT	ICK	JAM	JET	JIT	KAR	KEY	KIN	LAW	LAY	LIN	MAP	MAS	MAX	MID	MIX	PAY	PET	PIN	PIX	POX	RAY
	SIT	SLY	SNY	VAV	VEX	VOX	WAX	WAY	WHY													
231	DIG	GOD	GUM	HOG	IRE	MUN	PUB	RYE	SON	SUN	WYE	WYN										
312	FAB	FAD	FEE	ICH	MAG	NIM	OAK	ODD	OFF	PAD	PAN	PEG	PEL	PEN	QIN	RAM	RED	RIM	SAC	SEN	SIN	
	TEE	TIL	TIN	UCK	VAN	VAR	VAS	VAT	VEE	WAD	WAG	WAR	WEB	WEE	WET	WIG	XAT	XIS	YAK	YAM	YAP	
	YAW	YEN	YES	YIN	YIP	YOU	ZAG	ZAP	ZAX	ZEK	ZEN	ZIP	ZOA	ZOO								
321	LIE	MID	ROD	SEA	SIG	TED	VIA	VIE	VIM	VIS	VOE	VUG	ZED	ZIG	ZOA							

If we were thus to want to know what a certain pair of terms linked by the complement of specification corresponds to, we can, applying Table 3, provide some examples of possible results: the Age of Kos is the Arc (*I'*(132*123=132), the Eye of the Pin is the Sea (132*312 = 321), the Son of the Oak is the Bee (231*312=123), The Act of the Ego is the Bet (123*123=123), and so on. Through this procedure it is also possible to attribute meanings to syntagms that are not recognized or apparently make no sense. For example, we could say that Zex (word not belonging to the English language, 312) is the Ape of the Lie (132*321 = 312). If we are willing to recognize an aesthetic quality of a type of lexis that is thus defined, and of the associations that carry veins of a subtle lyricism that is also produced through this path, we can admit the possibility of a necessary dimension of poetry, in the sense of an automatic and intrinsic determination that belongs to it. "Singular metalinguistic affairs sometimes link words among themselves. One might say that in its uniqueness and completeness the Ternary or Radiant Language [Marino, in Saffaro's text] was buried from the very beginning, in the unknown depth of the language."

Table 3

123*123 = 123	123*132 = 132	123*213 = 213	123*231 = 231	123*312 = 312	123*321 = 321
132*123 =132	132*132 = 123	132*213 = 231	132*231 = 213	132*312 = 321	132*321 = 312
213*123 = 213	213*132 = 312	213*213 = 123	213*231 = 321	213*312=132	213*321= 231
231*123 = 231	231*132 = 321	231*213 = 132	231*231=312	231*312 = 123	231*321 = 213
312*123 = 312	312*132 = 213	312*213 = 321	312*231 = 123	312*312= 231	312*321 = 132
321*123 = 321	321*132 = 231	321*213 = 312	321*231 = 132	321*312 = 213	321*321 = 123