

## The Extended Sensorium

### Helen Keller: Mind over Instrumentation

by Meghan Rouillard

Part 2 of 2

#### Cosmic tuning?

In a recent report by Lyndon LaRouche, he provocatively referred to what implications the “extra senses” of animals had for the case of Helen Keller:

“As in the case of bird migration dependent upon a feature of cosmic radiation, there are a large number of types of cosmic radiation, within the relevant ranges, which have such a function specific to one or another type of living entity of either plant or animal life.

One might ask, what might be the relevance of this latter consideration to the case of Helen Keller?”<sup>13</sup>

Some of Helen Keller’s thoughts on this subject are provocative, and I think can be thought of in a new light in this context, in that they point the mind in the direction of thinking about what, in fact, she was “tuned into,” potentially from this standpoint of cosmic radiation. I think it is fair and appropriate to leave as a question provoked by her own words:

“Critics delight to tell us what we cannot do. They assume that blindness and deafness sever us completely



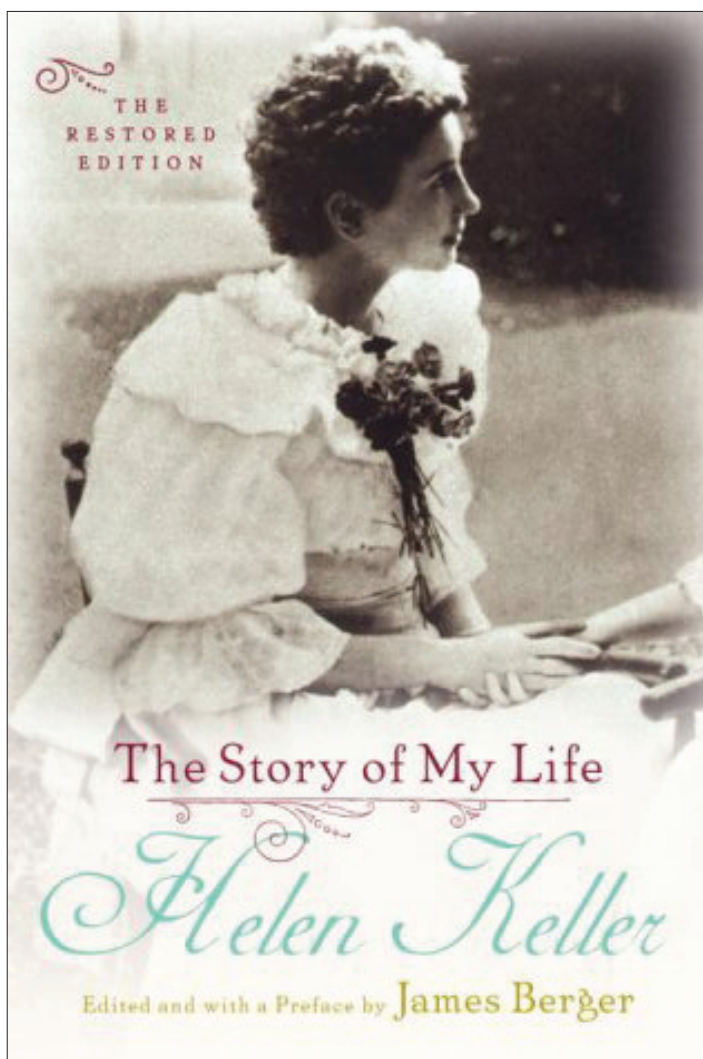
Helen Keller with Anne Sullivan

from the things which the seeing and the hearing enjoy, and hence they assert we have no moral right to talk about beauty, the skies, mountains, the songs of birds, and colours... Some brave doubters have gone so far even as to deny my existence... I throw upon the doubters the burden of proving my non-existence. When we consider how little has been found out about the mind, is it not amazing that any one should presume to define what one can know or cannot know? I admit that there are innumerable marvels in the visible universe unguessed by me. Likewise, O confident critic, there are a myriad sensations perceived by me of which you do not dream... Certainly the language of the senses is full of contradictions, and my fellows who have five doors to their house are not more surely at home in themselves than I...”

This quote from Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound* is also referred to by her, respecting her condition:

“My wings are folded o’er mine ears,  
My wings are folded o’er mine eyes,  
Yet through their silver shade appears,  
And through their lulling plumes arise,  
A shape, a throng of sounds.”

Is it really the case that the deaf cannot hear music?



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Helen with tenor Enrico Caruso.

Keller says of the voice of a soprano, "When I read the lips of a woman whose voice is soprano, I note a low tone or a glad tone in the midst of a high, flowing voice." What was Helen enjoying when she heard the tenor Enrico Caruso, and was moved to tears? Vibrations? Or something more? <sup>14 & 15</sup> Perhaps it involved a kind of sixth sense, as LaRouche has referred to, which perceives other characteristics of performed classical music than simple audible sounds.

The critic from *The Nation* who reacted so strongly to Keller's use of colour would probably be sent into a rage in response to the following on the work of the artist:

"In their highest creative moments, the great poet, the great musician cease to use the crude instruments of sight and hearing. They break away from their sense moorings, rise on strong compelling wings of spirit far above our misty hills and darkened valleys into the region of light, music, intellect."

But could we deny that this woman herself was not a veritable poet? However, perhaps the most provocative question yet is how she developed this capability of language, which itself seems to have been done through a means which surpasses that of sense perception. <sup>16</sup>

### The Human Element

We can examine this question through reflecting again, now, upon a question posed by Lyndon LaRouche a couple of years ago: how did Keller know that her teacher was a member of the same species as herself? The answer does not lie in some kind of group communication signal, like that which we see in the cephalopods or the mantis shrimp.

As a young girl, before being introduced to Anne Sullivan, Keller's relationship to the outside world was extremely limited. She describes herself as living in a "no-world," as she called it. She says she responded mainly to sensory stimulation

and desire, and did not understand that dogs and other animals were much different than she was. She only realised later that they did not have the cognitive powers which she says she only later developed—recognising and reflecting on the fact that her earlier responses to these desires and sensations were not something fundamentally human.

Her role as part of a human species was made increasingly clear to her through the process of human interaction and communication, and this is clear from her own telling of her story. This question became more clear through specific kinds of interactions based on language. For example, being presented with a paradox, in language, as presented by her teacher. *This word, which you thought you understood, also means this!*

She describes various experiences of this kind, where a flash of insight, almost like a flash of light, thus expanded her capability to communicate, and also, to think. When we learn that the word love can be used to describe an idea about the entire human species, and not simply the feelings about one person, we have a case of this. We make sense of this through a process of challenging our old idea, and this can put us at ease, in a certain way, through then knowing a more truthful idea. Perhaps an example of why Keller said Greek was her favourite language, had to do with the more precise words, in this language, to indicate the different meanings in this case.

This process of overthrowing old conceptions is actually what any young child, learning a language, experiences, and their universe expands through this process. <sup>17</sup> Dr. Tilney had also concluded that the main explanation for the overall difference in the development of Laura Bridgman and Keller, lay in the different approaches to introducing them to language and to society. Bridgman, who only used 50-60 monosyllabic sounds, which were not words, but were known to those who knew her, led a life which was much more



Helen Keller visiting President John F. Kennedy in the White House, 1961. The two are seated with Helen's secretary Evelyn D. Seide; a few Presidential aides are standing nearby.



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isolated, and her education was halted at 20 years of age.

It would seem that, in order to explain the clear quality of genius and overcoming of a sensory handicap in a person like Keller, if it were not able to be explained by senses or supersenses, as Dr. Tilney concluded, then perhaps it was primarily through something like paradox, something which involves the contradiction between experiences. The ability to comprehend a paradox is what arms us with the highest powers of language, which can be learned precisely because we can grasp ideas which bridge single sense impressions, and can develop through such a means.

Let us continue to dwell on this, because it would seem that the answer lies beyond sense perception or information: we can ask ourselves how one would teach a blind and deaf child concepts which were not merely the names of objects. Initially, when Helen was taught the word to think, it was a word which her teacher Anne Sullivan wrote on her head while she was beading a necklace. She said this made sense. But how was she then able, later in life, to wield the power of this word in such a different context? For example, we have these much more advanced uses of the word thought:

"I cannot always distinguish my own thoughts from those I read, because what I read becomes the very substance and texture of my mind," or,

"Just as the wonder-working mantle of the Nautilus changes the material it absorbs from the water and makes it a part of itself, so the bits and pieces of knowledge one gathers undergo a similar change and become pearls of thought," or, "Greek is the loveliest language that I know anything about. If it is true that the violin is the most perfect of musical instruments, then Greek is the violin of human thought."<sup>18</sup> Clearly, we can only bridge this gap through conceiving of the mind resolving new paradoxical uses of this idea over time. Here we have a hint as to a kind of characteristic of the mind which is transcendental to the declarative statements of information presented to it. Anne Sullivan herself reveals in her own journal kept throughout her teaching of Helen, a Platonic view of the human mind, as opposed to the outlook which she found to be more prevalent among educators. Keller herself said that a deaf-blind person could find special meaning in the writings of Plato. Sullivan wrote that the more typical and cynical outlook reflected the idea that, "*Every child is an idiot which must be taught to think.*" Sullivan's own experience in teaching Helen taught her otherwise, and she approached the task from the beginning with confidence in another view. She wrote:

"It is as easy to teach the name of an idea, if it is clearly formulated in the child's mind, as to teach the name of an object. It would indeed be a Herculean task



Helen with her pet dog as she meets actress Patty Duke.

to teach the words if the ideas did not already exist in the child's mind..."

She insisted on speaking to Helen in complete sentences, that she could "*catch from context the meaning of those words she did not know,*" and did not overly explain words which were new: "*little by little the meaning will come to her.*"

In reviewing the facts of the case of Helen Keller, it seems that it is our ability to grasp various levels of irony which permits the true development of the human species, in science, and in language. For without that, there is no pathway by which a blind and deaf girl could develop a broader concept of love, for example, another one of the first concepts she learned, than that associated with her first experience of it. But this same word took on a far greater meaning over time, which became as great as mankind and his garden, the earth, of which she spoke and wrote, but whose characteristics she was never able to sensually perceive in the same sense as one with 5 optimally functioning senses. Let us keep this case in mind as we explore the differences and similarities between the human and animal sensoriums in the rest of this report.

### Footnotes

<sup>13</sup> Lyndon LaRouche, "The Global Crisis Now at Hand," 2010, [larouchepac.com](http://larouchepac.com)

<sup>14</sup> See Sky Shields' report on Auroral hearing.

<sup>15</sup> See Aaron Halevy's report on Digital vs. Analog music

<sup>16</sup> Lyndon LaRouche, "The Sixth Sense," 2010. [larouchepac.com](http://larouchepac.com)

<sup>17</sup> Rankin, Jean Sherwood, "Helen Keller and the Language Teaching Problem," Vol. 9 No. 2 (Oct., 1908), pp 84-93

<sup>18</sup> Keller, Helen, *The Story of My Life*, 1902, in Bantam Classic Reissue, New York, 2005.



<p>Professor Ross Fart-o adds to Global Warming</p>
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