

brief notes

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we're either destroying ourselves or discovering the words for color examines how individual and cultural processes¹ shape who we are, who we hope to become and who we do become². It does this by examining our relationship to objects in our environment. There's a lot that happens between the internal space of Self and the external environment; the space that lies between me and something simple like a stone found on the ground outside an old apartment building is immense. Let's talk about this stone before we talk about *we're either destroying ourselves or discovering the words for color*.

If I look at the whole scene of the rock and me from my perspective³ — starting from Self and working outwards — I find myself in a certain time and place, defined by a weighted history⁴, having a language to put myself in relationship to both an internal and external world. This language (which we can think of as spoken to simplify things, but could also include gestural and non-verbal signaling) is interesting as it points to where I have spent time consuming energy⁵: what sort of food I eat, things I do for work, people I try to keep in my life. These areas of focus in my life shape my language. In this simple scene of me and a stone I'm drawing the stone, as well as other objects within my environment, into myself through the structures of language.

¹ I'm using the term "individual processes" to mean internal structures we use to create identity and "cultural processes" to indicate structures we are embedded in that create identity.

² I think the structures we are embedded in are both passive and active, in that we choose some and not others. If you think of each structure as a dimension that defines the volume of one's identity, then there is something to say about the authenticity of this volume based on the awareness one has to the passive/active structures they are embedded.

³ I'm a big fan of the current thinking being done around speculative realism and object oriented ontology, although some of the "newness" that is being declared with these modes of thinking I find a little disingenuous since Alfred North Whitehead was saying some things of a similar vein way back in the 1920s. In general, *we're either destroying ourselves or discovering the words for color* does not require one to think of the piece from the perspective of any particular structure. Feel free to be a rock or a speck of dust.

⁴ As in a history whose narrative is inflated/deflated based on my own sensations of meaning, value, and purpose.

⁵ There's an idea that Jeremy England, a biophysicist, proposed stating that life is actually the outcome of thermodynamics. His theory states (and shows through calculation), that structures in the universe (including life) are the outcome of arrangements which try to consume more and more energy. It would seem to point to us, as humans, as just energy garbage disposals.

And this moment with this stone also has a certain duration⁶, which points to its value and impression on me. If time is a structural component (describing a direction of entropy), duration is the emotional experience of time. Think of some image, any image, and the experience as you layer language and personal experience onto that image⁷, this is duration.

Time is relentless in its pace, while duration is constantly in flux; duration is the thing that says, “some things last longer than others”. The duration we feel with an object has a lot to do with how we place that object within the framework of Self; what sort of language we use to describe it and pull it towards ourselves.

we’re either destroying ourselves or discovering the words for color doesn’t necessarily have a vantage point for where you should start to relate these ideas into the piece; you can start viewing where you please. What exists are: a structure of Self (white-washed, wood construction), environmental and/or cultural objects (metal/concrete baskets), technical advancement and progress (coal dust), and a historical foundation to give context to both Self and elements of the environment (limestone dust).

History is a foundation for our ability to express within our environment some intent about who we are. Limestone, in its role as History, is well suited as it’s one of the oldest minerals used by humans both as a material for lodging⁸ as well as a material to express beliefs⁹. On top of the limestone there are metal/concrete baskets being drawn into Self from a starting point of mounds of coal dust. Through progress and technological advancement we are put into relationship to new objects which we must draw to ourselves using our current structure of language, while perhaps also forming new language¹⁰.

⁶ A lot of my thinking around this idea of duration comes from Henri Bergson, in particular his essay Time and Free Will. This essay changed a lot how I think about time not as something that I experience, so much as something that structures what my experiences happen within. In other words: I think Duration is what we usually mean when we talk about Time.

⁷ An image in this way I’m thinking of as a “poetic image” as Gaston Bachelard writes about it. Something that floats into the mind and is seen before it is spoken of.

⁸ Limestone has been used in construction for a long time and interestingly is still used in Bermuda in the construction of roofs. Bermuda has no real natural resources, except for a lot of limestone. This works out well as there is no good freshwater sources on Bermuda and the large limestone tiles cause a staircase like roof profile, which makes water flow more slowly off the roof into the gutters, allowing each house to capture maximum rain water.

⁹ See: The Sphinx

¹⁰ In linguistic relativity it is stated that language alters how we see the world. An interesting topic discussed within the theory is color. In certain research it has been shown that any language with two words for color, will have the

The white/black of the coal/limestone and red of the motor, take on significance as they point to cultural containers, in this case parts of language, that are perhaps unavoidable (as talked about in the footnote about linguistic relativity.) Also, while the limestone, as mineral opposed to color, relates to history, the coal, as mineral, represents combustion and a source of energy; it speaks to our ever increasing consumption of energy, which also involves some sort of by product, either new cultural objects or, at the very least, heat.

As the baskets move across the floor, our progress becomes tangled into parts of our history based on the new objects we have given importance to¹¹. In this moment we must choose to define the space that is created; choose how we draw an object towards us. While time is relentless in changing these objects relationship to Self, their duration can become denser and more meaningful as they are marked deeper and deeper in our history. It is our choice on how to give value to this interplay between the energy devoted to an object and the history it shares with us.

The baskets are meant to bring to mind the rebar/concrete rubble of cleared buildings, or the shape of a tumbleweed found in a town on some frontier. Both speak to the possibility of what will come next, as well as the loss of what was left behind. And which perspective we choose changes the words we use to create our new space, the structure that we will use to embed these new objects within Self. This perspective will be framed by internal structures of Self and the cultural structures laid around us, mixing both as if creating a line between black and white, driven by the possibility of a word like “red”; and in this new mix, the entirety of the structure will change. New outcomes and dimensionality become available.

Or, instead, we will drag something disastrous, a ball of rubble, into the structures of who we are, standing with our backs to what we hope to become.

words “black” and “white”. If there is a third color in the language it will be “red”. After this languages start to diverge. Interestingly, though, the color choices in a language will tend to alter what colors people are adept at seeing. Cultures that live in environments with more shades of green, for instance, will develop more commonly used words related to “green”. The result is that they can easily differentiate these different hues, while cultures of people that don’t have such a rich vocabulary around “green”, won’t be able to easily differentiate these colors. You can actually do a test on yourself with this online.

¹¹ While there are many associations to be made to the baskets (to be talked about later), I like at the beginning of the process how they sit atop the mounds of coal almost like some artifact being presented. Or maybe a showcase for some tool from the future. Is there such a thing as a Future Artifact?