



THE PARADOX OF THE SHADOW

Constructivism and the Hidden Order

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Morphology is the study of the way words are formed from smaller units called morphemes. The lack of such morphemes erodes our understanding of words, and thus of language as a whole. This absence of semantic understanding is what is called “asemia”. *Asemic poetry* is writing “having no semantic content”.¹ Illegible, invented, or primal scripts (pictographs, doodles, children’s drawings, etc.) are all influences upon asemic writing. We see calligraphic strokes but find no meaning or context in which to supply interpretation.² Morphemes, repeated characters and strokes may be present, but they lack intelligible textual consistency. Decryption is impossible since no primer is set up in which to construct the lexicon. The images tend to have no fixed meaning from our past, except for that which we project upon them. Every viewer can arrive at a personal, absolutely correct interpretation.



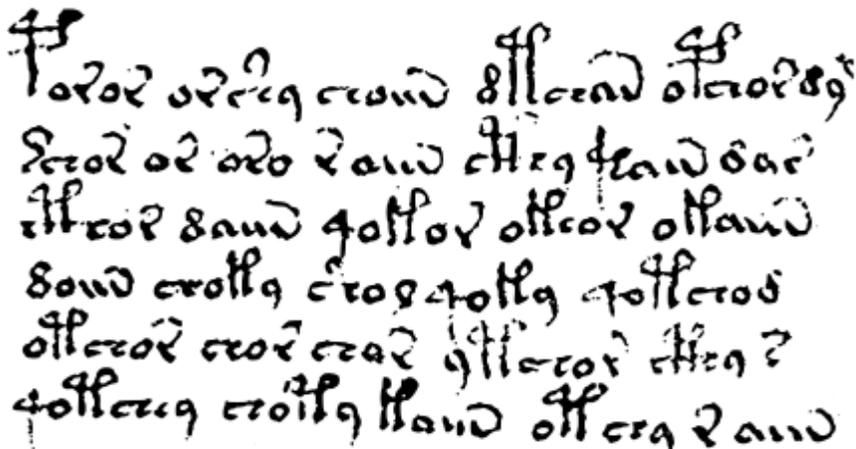
Tom Kemp, Oxford England from *Asemic Magazine*, Vol. 2.

We see these objects differently than others do, as we see ourselves different *from* others. This sense of self is developed in childhood between the age of six months and two years, during what Piaget called the sensorimotor stage, as a matter of learning to distinguish oneself from others and the environment by means of visual, auditory, and other perceptual modes. Piaget believed that human beings assimilate external events, and convert them to fit their mental structures. During this stage of our development, we learn to make meanings through these interactions with our environment.³ Our bodily limits are explored, and we begin to distinguish inside from outside. If there is an illusion of separation between the subjective inner world and objective outer environment, then it is now during this time that the illusion is developed. However, these schemata accommodate all kinds of modes of being and experiencing of the world, and are modified as we gain more experience and insight. They are the building blocks for our natural construction of our reality; similar to the way morphemes are used to construct language.

Knowledge can be thus seen as a product of human experience and is socially and culturally constructed independent of language. In fact, for the social constructivist⁴, reality itself is not something that we can discover because it does not exist prior to our invention of it; semantic recognition of an object’s essence would be, in effect, our shadow projections upon it based on previous experiences, sensations, perceptions, and evolutionary genetic imprints. Basically, our memories define who we are and how we interact with the world-out-there. Andre Kukla argues that reality itself is constructed by our own activities and that people, together as members of a society, invent the properties of the world.⁵ Hence we develop fads and styles acceptable to society as a whole, and as fashion changes so does our reality. Earlier theorists argued, however, reality does

exist prior to our discovery of it which posits ultimate knowledge of an object's essence can be garnered directly from the object.

However, it seems an object taken out of its phenomenological context would appear empty and hollow, as in the case of the mysterious Voynich manuscript, written between 1450 and 1520 AD. Its seemingly arbitrary text has led to much conjecture as to its authenticity, and other than the exotic inferences to glossolalia, natural constructed languages and hoaxes conjured in our imagination, the text is, in-itself, surfcial and void of any attributable semantic content; an example of what we would experience of the world if we were an Asemic.



Text sample from the Voynich manuscript., Voynich manuscript. (2009, March 1). In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Retrieved 21:37, March 2, 2009, from http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Voynich_manuscript&oldid=274026421

Hence, language deceives, and its failure to communicate the inextricable essence of things, and ourselves, only emphasizes the disparity between the physical and the mental. Here we must stress the difference between the recognition of the intrinsic semantics of an object and the psychophysical affect produced by it. Likewise, spaces and forms can affect us without our understanding of their symbolism, however conscious interpretation necessarily implies awareness, and awareness is beget by consciousness. Unfortunately, consciousness does not require our interpretation of the things true being, and interpretation does not require consciousness. Our semiotic understanding of the thing may occur unconsciously as a manifestation of the disassociated memories in our primitive brain. Hence, what *a priori* knowledge of this sacred, then, do we share with others that can affect our behavior and sense of being-in-the-world? What ancient spark fused man's bicameral mind⁷ resonating and reverberating in our unconscious the quintessential memories of our primordial experiences? What were those first instinctive primal utterances of humanity, and more importantly, where did they come from? Was it recognition of himself, the raging world, or of a Being greater than he?

We must distinguish between the construction of our initial reality as a child developing through the sensorimotor stage, and the maturity of conscious thought as an adult. Obviously a child has little few experiences from which to base theoretical concepts about their existence. As an adult, these concepts are more or less fully developed attributable to the pathways of neuronal processes streaming endlessly over the years. Recognition of abstract thoughts and influences from our past signify our reliance on these memories as our basis for reason and decision making. It is possible that both the constructivists and the determinists may be partially correct. A child at this stage develops through exploration of their environment, whereas an adults reality is malleable and perpetuated through the illusion of separateness. Such is the paradox of the shadow. That which drives us forward towards connection eventually fragments us internally. Each of us develops an internal lexicon of resilience and determination towards development of a separate self distinguished from others and ultimately from our environment, however, the more we seek separation, the more we fall into a desire to assimilate into society. The version of reality we originally posses homogenizes into luke warm acceptance of others as symbolic simulacra and ultimately mirrors of ourselves.

Thomas de Quincey hypothesized that words are released from the soul like bark shedding from a tree. Beneath the heartwood, at the pith, below the fleshy layers of our Being, the true essence and meaning of our words are generated. Like sap, these words seep through to the outer crust to peel off into the world beyond.⁶ Communication relies on the common understanding and transference of meaning between the speaker and the listener. Unfortunately, our limited vocabulary narrowly describes what it is we are intending to say. Imagine what the grain patterning of a plain slice veneer of your Being would look like. Would you panel your walls with it?⁸ Indeed, even Gaston Bachelard imagines that "a word is a bud attempting to become a twig".⁹ Wars raged for centuries before civilization was able to express its dominance upon the primitive barbarian intellect, and language, that first edifice of human consciousness, it seems, actually *was* built with sticks and stones.

In themselves, are not words mere meaningless utterances until we are able to attach significance to them? How can they hold meaning intrinsically as ideas or phenomena separate from our previous experience with them? Likewise with architectural elements; form, color and texture are mere visual "shells" until we reach out cognitively to construct an image in our mind upon which we place meaning. Whether this placement of meaning is learned or innate has been highly debated. Thus, meaning is not the symbol itself, nor does it abide in the symbol. The true interpretation of the image does not occur in the deciphering of the symbol; is neither the signifier nor the signified. It occurs as memory percolating up from forgotten genetic and cultural significances. Our perceptions of the world-as-is are laden with an asymmetrical relationship between the perceiver and that which is perceived. Thus, our reflections in the mirror of reality are tainted by our own experiences, and our perceptions of the thing and the thing itself are also lopsided leading to an instability of structural focus, and a falling-back into ourselves. Because of this disparity, we can never really "touch" the essence of the thing, and the only thing that is not either the thing or the perceiver of the thing is what is in between. This is the residence of the obscure, the "Treasury of the Shadow"¹⁰, and this is where we begin to understand the essence of the sacred, and the source of imagination. Truth lays in silence amidst the duality of our existence, in the void - the unfamiliar space between each moment, each thought, each image; the moment between two heart beats, between two breaths; the moment when Blake's "eternity can be contained in an hour".¹¹ It is the shadowy gap which embodies the eternal; that rich potential of Nothingness, pregnant and swollen with anticipation, unmarred by being and becoming. Before sound, there is only silence, and from the depths of this silence images emerge. Bachelard's hypothesis, simply put, is that the spontaneous appearance in consciousness of an image begins the process of creation - an occurrence he describes as "a sudden salience on the surface of the psyche."¹²

END

End Notes

1. The Free Dictionary; Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary, published 1913 by C. & G. Merriam Co., asemia
2. Brett Wilbur, *Asemic Architecture and Poetics: The Sacred and the Forgotten*, 2008.
3. "Theory of cognitive development." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. 28 Feb 2008, 00:21 UTC. Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. 28 Feb 2008 <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Theory_of_cognitive_development&oldid=194543179>.
4. "Constructivism (learning theory)." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. 30 Sep 2007, 18:28 UTC. Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. 2 Oct 2007 <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Constructivism_%28learning_theory%29&oldid=161361766>.
5. Andre Kukla, *Social Constructivism and the Philosophy of Science*. New York: Routledge, (2000).
6. Thomas de Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, 1822.
7. Julian Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*, 1976.

8. AWI Quality Standards Illustrated, 8th Edition, p. 14. It's also interesting to note that the Architectural Woodwork Institute states that "the pith and bark... are excluded from finished lumber". Sadly, the bark and core are discarded for want of a beautiful veneer.
9. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Reverie: Childhood, Language, and the Cosmos*, Beacon Paperback by arrangement with Grossman Publishers, Inc., 1971, p. 17.
10. John Lobell, *Between Silence and Light, Spirit in the Architecture of Louis I. Kahn*, 1979.
11. William Blake, *Auguries of Innocence*, ca. 1805.
12. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, Beacon Press, 1994, p. xv

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