

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Light and Time – Painting from Nature

Edward Lawrenson · Wednesday, April 22nd, 2015

After a busy weekend visiting family, cramming as many important moments with people who mean a lot into tiny moments of interaction, I found myself repeatedly revisiting/re-living these moments. Studying images of the weekend's events, saved for posterity through various Instagram posts, Facebook albums or on my personal camera roll; I became aware to the slowly emerging realisation of time's staccato-like nature. Innumerable nano-events sandwiched together in an infinite chain.

I heard recently, whilst listening to some linguistically or anthropologically angled radio programme about the differences between cultures and how their vocabulary of time has a direct correlation to *temporal anxiety*.

Although I forget the specifics of this gradually degrading memory, (slowly disintegrating with each retelling and subsequent inaccuracies) I believe the gist of the piece held that western cultures, in particular, whose language utilises the past, present and future tense, allow the speaker to retain concern for that which has happened, that which is happening and that what is yet to happen.

In contrast to this, cultures with languages which favour the simpler use of the present tense, e.g. "I meet you, then, I fly home," somehow enable the speaking members of the society to remain in the moment more easily. They are facilitated in experiencing each moment more wholly, or presently, thus reducing the tendency to abstract hypotheses of what past and future consequences ones actions may have or have had.

In one of my favourite Science Fiction novels, *Fremder*, by the late Russell Hoban, the author imagines a not too distant future in which society has discovered that existence, or rather *time*, is not not a continuum, but in fact a series of fragmented moments which flicker at such a rate that the illusion of continuity is upheld. Like frames in a film.

I am fascinated by these notions of time and how they in fact effect many of our interactions with the everyday. In my own life, I have made a choice to paint direct from nature, rather than from photography. Although I had not made the connection until now, my reason is because I believe that an image captured in a fraction of a second does not accurately depict an object in space, moving through time, existing moment after moment (as you experience it).

While perceiving people, objects or other phenomena in space-time, you are simultaneously receiving other variable sensory data (sounds, smells or meteorological fluctuations) which have an

affect upon your experience of the perceived, from moment to moment.

In the attempt to learn to see honestly and objectively, one must also accept that every tiny observation, every subtle tonal transition or new colour noted and mixed, every daub or flick of the brush, is an individual decision: a unique, solitary moment in itself and the orange you looked at a second ago is now a different orange to the one you see now (however quantum these differences).

What a painting from life becomes is a complex multilayered mesh lattice of thousands of momentary existences, recorded, organised and compiled in the hope of representing a coherent simulacrum of the reality itself unfolding, second by second, in front of the painter.

I believe that the shifting, vibrating nature of painting, is what makes it akin to film and existence itself, the overlapping of the two media becomes apparent in films like Andrei Tarkovsky's *Zerkalo* (*Mirror*), where extended shots of nature allow the camera to gaze at nature and the viewers to immerse themselves within this projected, screen bound environment.

Perhaps painting falls short in many cases because it fails, like film and the continuum of Fremder's world, to convince the viewer of the motion of time, but instead freezes millions of passing moments in a single still image. This is why a painting lacks the cool ease of photography which only has to capture one moment, but for me at least, it remains the more mysterious of the two.

Top image credit to Eadweard Muybridge.

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