



The Library

UC SAN DIEGO

Submerged Memories

April 20, 2013
8 minutes, 30 seconds

Speaker: Philip Larson

Transcribed by: Sarah Fuchs

[IDEAS Performance Series](#)

UC San Diego Library Digital Collections
<https://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb8193777d>

Copyright: Under copyright (US)

Rights Holder: Roger Reynolds

Use: This work is available from the UC San Diego Library. This digital copy of the work is intended to support research, teaching, and private study.

Constraint(s) on Use: This work is protected by the U.S. Copyright Law (Title 17, U.S.C.). Use of this work beyond that allowed by "fair use" requires written permission of the UC Regents. Responsibility for obtaining permissions and any use and distribution of this work rests exclusively with the user and not the UC San Diego Library. Inquiries can be made to the UC San Diego Library program having custody of the work.

Time Transcription

00:05 [IDEAS Initiative For Digital Exploration of Arts and Sciences]

00:15 [Submerged Memories
Roger Reynolds
Saturday April 20th, 2013
Qualcomm Institute]

00:30 Philip Larson: It is submerged memories that give to dreams their curious air of hyper-reality, but perhaps there is something else as well, something nebulous, gauze-like, through which everything one sees in dreams seems, paradoxically, much clearer. A pond becomes a lake, a breeze becomes a storm, a handful of dust, a desert. If we stand today before the large canvas of Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson*, we are standing precisely where those who were present at the dissection stood and we believe that we see what they saw then. In the foreground, the greenish prone body of Aris Kindt, his neck broken and his chest risen terribly in rigor mortis. It is somehow odd that Dr. Tulip's colleagues are not looking at Kindt's body. That their gaze is directed just past it to focus on the open anatomical atlas, in which the appalling physical facts are reduced to a diagram, a schematic plan of the human being. Though the body is open to contemplation, it is, in some sense, excluded. And the much admired verisimilitude of Rembrandt's picture proves, upon closer examination, to be more apparent than real. Contrary to normal practice, the anatomies shown here is not begun by dissecting the opening the abdomen removing the intestines, which are the most prone to putrefaction, but has started, and this too may employ a punitive dimension to the act by dissecting the offending hand.

02:28 Now this hand is most peculiar. It is not only grotesquely out of proportion compared with the hand closer to us, but is anatomically the wrong way around. The exposed tendons which ought to be those of the left hand, given the position of the thumb, are in fact those of the back of the right hand. In other words, what we are faced with is a transposition taken from the anatomical atlas that turns this otherwise true to life painting, if one may so express it, into a crass misrepresentation at the exact center point of its meaning. It seems inconceivable that we are faced here with the unfortunate blunder. Rather, I believe, there was a deliberate intent behind this flaw in the composition. That unshapely hand signifies the violence that has been done to Aris Kindt. It is with him, the victim, and not the Guild that gave Rembrandt his commission that the painter identifies. His gaze alone is free of Cartesian rigidity. He alone sees the greenish annihilated body, and he alone sees the shadow in the half-open mouth and over the dead man's eyes.

04:03 All knowledge is enveloped in darkness. What we perceive are no more than isolated lights in the abyss of ignorance. In the shadow-filled edifice of the world,

we study the order of things as brown but we cannot grasp the innermost essence. The buffet at Santa Lucia Station was surrounded by an infernal upheaval. If one did not have a ticket, one had to shout up to the enthroned women who appeared to float quite unaffected by the general commotion, above the heads of the supplicants and would pick out at random one of the pleas emerging from the crossfire of voices and repeat it over the uproar with a load assurance that denied all possibility of doubt, and then bending down a little, indulgent and at the same time disdainful, hand over the ticket. Once in possession of this scrap of paper, which had now come to seem a matter of life and death, one had to fight one's way out of the crowd and across to the middle of the cafeteria, where the male employees of this awesome gastronomic establishment, faced the jostling masses with withering contempt, performing their duties in an unperturbed manner which, given the prevailing panic, gave an impression of a film in slow motion.

05:35

In their freshly starched white linen jackets, the impressive corps of attendants resembled some strange company of higher beings sitting in judgment, under the rules of an obscure system, of the endemic greed of a corrupt species. My cappuccino was served, and, for a moment, I felt that having achieved this distinction constituted the supreme victory of my life. I surveyed the scene and immediately saw my mistake, for the people around me now looked like a circle of severed heads. A prey to unpleasant observations and far-fetched notions of this sort, I suddenly had a feeling that, amidst this circle of specters, I had attracted someone's attention. And, indeed, it transpired that the eyes of two young men were on me. They were leaning on the bar across from me. Just as the shadow of a cloud passes across a field, so fear passed across my mind. Like two watchmen, they remained motionless at their post until the sunlight had all but faded then they stood up and I had the impression that they bowed to each other before vanishing in the darkness of the exit. At first, I could not move from the spot, I had to muster all my rational power before I was able to get up and make my way to the exit. When I was almost there, I had a compulsive vision of an arrow whistling through the grey air, about to pierce my left shoulder blade and with a distinct, sickening sound penetrate my heart. I can still feel the cold breath of air. It was as if it were now up to me, alone. As if, by some trifling mental exertion, I could reverse the entire course of history. All that was required was a moment of concentration.