

Thinking
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Both Jeremy Gray and also a student, at different times, said to me that thinking has no purpose other than intrinsic; that it constitutes its own purpose.

I have wondered about something related to this.

About fifteen years ago, an animal rights activist mentioned that when a sow is about to give birth, it uses its snout as if it were trying to push soil and plants to make a nest; even while there has never been anything in the animal's experience except the concrete floor of the pen.

At the time I heard this, I had not yet learned that many other people shared my belief that one can gain insight into prehistoric nature by seeing modern behavior. This is a great example, because in the behaviour of the sow, as moves its snout on the concrete floor, you can see a mirror image perhaps of even particular types of plants particular types of soil, of nature, of habitat.

It might be that if the pen were kept warm, the sow would have a different pattern of dragging the snout on the concrete. As if it were helping us by making a painting of the nature its species has experienced, we could look at the pattern of snout smears and learn about nature that actually had been experienced by sows.

Likewise, with students, we can look at the things which they write in admiration of their mentors.

An example is the youtube video of the song 25 or 6 to 4 that is posted by the youtube user Hoisen.

At the 2:22 mark, during a guitar solo, an annotation says "OMFG...Just Spectacular," and the seventh comment says, "OMG- Quit bickering and listen to the awesome song."

Among the lyrics are,

"Feeling like I ought to sleep.
 Getting up to splash my face.
 Searching for something to say.
 Sitting cross-legged on the floor.
 Wanting just to stay awake.
 Should I try to do some more.
 25 or six to 4:00.
 Wondering how much I can take."

Looking it up, one finds indeed that the lyricist had been required to produce a song, had nothing to write, and merely wrote his incidental observations about how it is nearly four in the morning, and he is getting tired and still hasn't thought of anything.

If he were more respectful of his audience's cognition he might have written less deceptively

"I'm required to write some words.
 But it's really late at night.

Doesn't matter what they say.
Can't believe it's four AM.
Getting up to brush my teeth.
Where'd they put the dental floss."

Just as you see in a sow's painting, made
by its snout on the concrete floor of its pen,
a mirror reflection of nature that had been
there in the distant past, you see in the
students' admiration for the song a mirror
reflection of a meaningful way that young kids
might have admired older kids.

Just as the individual modern sow doesn't actually
check if there is any grass, any earth, being
pushed by the snout, the modern kids don't
actually check if there is any meaning in
the lyrics they hear.

The song couldn't be just an instrumental.
It needed to have *some* lyrics. It might
be possible that the word choice conveys
something ("should I try to do some more"
having more 'cool' word choice than
"where'd they put the dental floss"), but
it seems clear also that the actual meaning
of the lyrics is unimportant for these kids
as long as it is not a known trivial meaning.

Just as the sow needed to have a flat concrete
floor before it could perform the snout action,
the kids need to have a sound of speaking.

Just as it does not matter for the sow *what*
is on the floor, it does not matter for the
kids *what* the lyrics say.

That is, the sow will start working with its snout
as soon as it finds a flat floor, even if the floor
is empty, just as the kids will admire a song
and write "OMG" and "OMFG" as long as there is
a sound of *some* lyrics, not obviously identifiable
as something ridiculous.

Just as the designer of the pen is a single
individual person (not a miraculous ecosystem)
the author of the song is a single lyricist
in a hotel room, not part of any intact
human community.