

EXT. BIRD BLIND - DAY

Doug approaches the bird blind and starts to enter

INT. SBL CONFERENCE ROOM

Doug is watching this introduction on a screen and breaks in now and then.

Hanna's voice is heard over a series of images on the screen.

HANNAH (V.O.)

The Mnemonic Beings Lab works with many types of mnemonic behaviors. These include short-term memory, long-term memory, photographic memory and the like.

(beat)

We also work on the relationship between memory, knowledge, and feeling.(beat)

We study learning speeds, regurgitation vs osmosis, and we study a range of systematic mnemonic behaviors like writing, cues and ars memoria, handheld and laptop usage. We also concentrate on habitual and corporeal mnemonic behaviors from cycling and driving, to even opening doors, turning on faucets, opening bottles, and thousands of other things including the use of language itself.

(beat)

We've also been studying reactions to violence or injury, if that makes any immediate sense here. Let's consider the following scene.

Repeated clip of Doug running into the side of a door.

When we show this to people, the reactions vary. In some we notice a wince, a kind of imitative, empathic gesture, in some of them and in other we also notice a certain kind of amusement, seeing something funny in it. Both are normal, standard responses, the latter maybe being partially elicited at Walters' expression of anger just after impact.

HANNAH

We want to know more about the link between empathy and amusement, because we see it as a key piece of the puzzle of syncretic behaviors.

(beat)

What brought us to focus on this was our study in memory, knowledge and feeling or traumatic situations.

INT. MNEMONIC BEINGS LAB - DAY

HANNAH

As human beings, we all generally have similar abilities to know and change the universe in different ways. It's also true that most of us vary in our RELATIVE strengths and weaknesses to know and change it.

(beat)

A dancer changes the universe in certain ways, a banker and factory worker in other ways, and a chemist in yet still other ways altogether.

(beat)

In ancient Greece, the philosopher Plato described knowing and changing the universe in terms of memory. If you ask anyone the right questions, he said, you'll see that everyone is capable of reaching roughly the same learned conclusions about the universe. Since not everyone has STUDIED the universe, said Plato, this knowledge and ability must somehow be in all of us, but we simply do not remember it.

INT. SBL CONFERENCE ROOM

DOUG

In West Africa you'll find a related idea. This idea is that each of us, while still in the womb, came to know his or her destiny, but few of us can remember this destiny. In some way, we are aware of all sorts of being IN SLEEP, from being disabled to more enabled sorts of being.
(beat)

Not just dreaming needs to be studied, as it has been for so long in itself, but dreaming needs to be paired with sleep. I've sometimes wondered if maybe hallucination like delusion is PERCEPTION TAKEN TO BE ACTIONABLE, while sleep is perception taken to NOT be actionable - precisely because we are disabled in sleep. To a certain extent, this might be the key to the Scrooge problem that the Hallucinatory Beings Lab is studying.

INT. MNEMONIC BEINGS LAB - DAY

HANNAH

The term "Mnemonic" means having to do with memory and remembering. Things, techniques and systems that help us remember.

HANNAH (V.O.)

This really includes a lot of things, from stories, to songs, to rhymes, to inscriptions, to collections of objects of all sorts, are universal throughout humanity.

(beat)

In most of our lives today, we deal with a wide variety of mnemonic tools, like printed texts, recorded and illustrated stories, digital interfaces, and so on, These things help us remind ourselves of things we need to remember.

HANNAH

While most of these tools are syncretic in nature, most of us have come to see them and work with them in particular cultural contexts, and these contexts limit what they are able to remind us of.

(beat)

HANNAH (V.O.)

From various professions, to reading and writing poetry, to religious and political groups, mnemonic aids serve particular functions within particular cultural settings that LIMIT their use and effect TO SOME PARTICULAR BUSINESS AT HAND.

HANNAH

The kinds of beings we develop here in the Mnemonic Beings Lab are outwardly syncretic. They work against the force that particular cultures use to limit knowledge and ability.

(beat)

In contrast to culturally specific mnemonic aids, the mnemonic beings we develop in our lab point to more constructive ways to solve what we see as very vexing problems to humanity overall, and not to this or that culture in particular.

HANNAH (V.O.)

These mnemonic beings aren't located within a particular culture's needs to remember this or that. They're not like texts or digital interfaces. Instead, they're meant to span different

forms of human experience, elicit the right questions and answers, and help us remember the universe that we, as a species, have been helped by our cultures to forget.

HANNAH

The reason why we use the term mnemonic or syncretic “BEINGS” and not "tools," "aids," "devices," or "systems" is mainly due to a series of facts.

HANNAH (V.O.)

First, Anthropology has consistently shown that while we humans see and actually tend to treat other humans, animals, plants and the wide variety of other organisms in our world as beings.

(beat)

Second, we often treat them as HUMAN, describing them as similar to ourselves even when describing how they are different.

(beat)

Third, we also universally see and treat other entities such as gods, spirits, systems, emotions, sentiments, forms of violence, and so on as beings with human-like needs and motivations, if not scale, dimension, and overall order.

HANNAH

I can't discuss current projects in detail, but I CAN give a few examples.

HANNAH (V.O.)

Unlike these culturally driven, categorized entities we distinguish as animals, plants, minerals, gods, spirits, systems, and so on, the beings we create at SBL are engineered to be “anthropomorphically resistant.”

HANNAH

This means they do not lend themselves, or at least RESIST lending themselves, to being understood and used as other humans, as animals, as plants, minerals, gods, spirits, systems, and so on. Instead, we create and help others use them as means towards self-knowledge, a means toward remembering in ones own way, according to ones own strengths and weaknesses. Helping you remember, know and feel what the various CULTURES you live and are invested in have helped you forget, helped you ignore, unlearn, or become numb to.

(beat)

In our lab we focus on the mnemonic through things that are forgotten, but are right in front of us, things we are experiencing, but ignoring. Much of this kind of study so far has been about forgotten or ignored SURFACES AND BODIES.

(beat)

I'll give a few examples.

(beat)

First, lets take the TI Calculator project.

SLIDE OF LUKASA

HANNAH (V.O.)

One of the devices we've been working with for some time is a traditional mnemonic device found among the Luba people of the Congo. By moving their fingers around this device,

touching the pegs, grooves and other tactile features of this device, those who have learned to do so can tell long histories related to their tribes.

HANNAH

Now HERE is a device that HAS ALSO BEEN a Texas Instruments TI-30 Pocket Calculator from the 1970s. I can tell you about the syncretic link between the TI-30 calculator and the Lukasa, but not how it works.

HANNAH (V.O.)

This device is set to the history of Marshall, Michigan, small midwestern city of around 9000 people.

HANNAH

While it may sound odd, we learn and teach this history through it via tactility. We need to learn this 1970s interface visually and tactily, learning to link the history of Marshall, Michigan to it. Here, the numbers of the buttons on the calculator itself mean nothing per se. They don't matter. They're just tactile references in the form of buttons.

(beat)

I can't discuss the numbers on the LCD readout.

(beat)

Other devices we are working on include ones that resemble books, but focus more on tactile interfaces with them. The idea here is to discount the language and emphasize the interaction with the object itself. Part of this has to do with what I would call confronting the type, kind of like this.

Hannah's hands rub the letters on a page to smudge them, showing the ink that has rubbed off on her thumbs.

Taking it in our hands and sort of confronting this inky side of text.

Hannah has before her different types of screens and some film.

Other devices in our repertoire involve surfaces of viewing screens, like TVs, computer screens, and also surfaces like those of film itself, and of screens and other surfaces that things are projected onto.

Hannah holds the film up to the light to look at the image on it.

What we try to de-emphasize in THESE cases is the light.

(beat)

In addition to all of this, there is a sort of alternative base taxonomy that we are working with in some cases. These are kinds of bodies and bodily memory, including:

HANNAH (V.O.)

bodies of water and their kinds of memory,

Slide

bodies of dance, when people dance around things, and their kinds of memory,

Slide

bodies of fear, like screens, walls, blinds, and their kinds of memory,

Slide

bodies of night, which is basically the heavens and their kind of memory,

Slide

bodies of holes, or pits, those kind of invisible bodies that we see sense as air, and their kinds of memory,

Slide

bodies of hammers, and their kinds of memory,

Slide

bodies of warriors, and their kinds of memory, and

Slide

bodies of tables, and their kinds of memory.

Each of these kinds of bodies and memory requires a good deal more explication, of course.

INT. SBL CONFERENCE ROOM

DOUG

You see, when she lays her lab's projects out a bit like that, what they are doing seems more like science.

(beat)

But there's still that strong tendency to think of syncretic scientific activity like this as something more like art, philosophy or religion.

INT. MNEMONIC BEINGS LAB

HANNAH

Maybe because of their association with religious things, these other, syncretic scientists are thought of as having more to do with belief and the kinds of self-delusion that social groups have the power to create and maintain. Maybe this makes them seem strange or cult-like.

INT. SBL CONFERENCE ROOM

DOUG

She's right, and I've gotta say this view hasn't been helped much by cultural anthropologists who have traditionally described syncretic practices as religious instead of scientific.

INT. MNEMONIC BEINGS LAB

HANNAH

I've noticed that still today in the study of anthropology, while one sees many more studies of scientific cultures than before, the very idea that this might also include studies of syncretic scientists is.

INT. SBL CONFERENCE ROOM

DOUG

Yes, she's right. Even in anthropology, the syncretic scientist has few friends. What might have been studied as scientific pursuits, are instead studied as fascinating and curious SYSTEMS. These systems are depicted as somehow working through a deep enculturation into stories, myths and all of the sentimental associations these stories or myths make possible. These sentiments or other such reactions are supposed to be triggered by symbols and signs. Anthropologists too often write the syncretic scientist out of the picture by favoring this story and mythic world IN ITSELF.

INT. MNEMONIC BEINGS LAB

HANNAH

I've found the more one learns about both scientists and syncretic scientists, the more one sees that both are best considered today in different frames than those of science or religion alone.

(beat)

While the mythical world may play a key role among NON-SCIENTISTS, it plays much less of a role amongst both syncretic and non-syncretic scientists around the world.

(beat)

It seems it's not due to cultural participation in some great SYSTEM of myth, or math, or whatever that syncretic scientists work their effects. Instead, it's actually INDIVIDUAL ACTION that changes the universe, that changes things, persons, places.

INT. SBL CONFERENCE ROOM

DOUG

Interesting. You know, one area I've been encouraging SBL to get involved in is what some are calling Geek Subcultures. While these subcultures are widely participated in by scientists, I agree with Hannah that they IN THEMSELVES don't give science its power. What I've been urging them to explore is (1) how these Geek cultural ways allow individual scientists to change themselves and others and (2) how the response of the majority or the powerful against them facilitates this change.

INT. MNEMONIC BEINGS LAB

HANNAH

We tend to associate the work of syncretic scientists with OTHER GROUPS of people and their representatives, like natives, or Geeks and son on and not with OTHER PERSONS and their syncretic abilities. One thing our lab has found is that we ignore the interpersonal factors of love, friendship, mourning, and letting go. Stop learning from people we work with AS REPRESENTATIVES OF OTHER GROUPS. We need to focus more not on past cultures but SELVES, accepting their past-ness - as we and they change.

HANNAH (V.O.)

This is why the story of Solaris, not the book alone, but the films too, one by Andrei Tarkovsky and one by Steven Soderburgh, both make up one of our key subjects of study. This combined filmic and printed person, place and thing you could call Solaris is another one of my lab's synbedevels.

INT. SBL CONFERENCE ROOM

DOUG

What she says about systems of myth or math and method demonstrate this individual as opposed to social, mythical, system role. Math and method don't exist IN THEMSELVES but are rather means used by individuals to change themselves and others.