

# Seis Ensayos de la Realidad

## Lingüística Española



Alejandro Roig

Advised by Nicole Legnani

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# Acknowledgments

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This work is in accordance with the University's Honor Code.

s/ Alejandro Roig

# 1. Language in High Definition

Hello reader, welcome. In French, *essai*, means an attempt, or so I've been told. In Spanish, *ensayo* means a rehearsal. The following is a set of attempts, thought experiments, narratives, a relation of relatively related relations which seek to challenge your concept of language. To do this, we will draw largely from the case of the Spanish language.

If you're reading this, you likely know a thing or two about language. You may speak it, you may read it, you may write it. Let me ask you this; Are you in it? Are you on it? Are you of it? Are you from it? Are you for it, or perhaps against it? Is that possible? Language can appear so all encompassing, a central component in what it is to be human these days, that it may be difficult to answer these questions. Let us begin by defining 'it.' What is language?

In describing language the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure made a point to differentiate between *langue* and *parole*. These fancy words *en français*, when translated into English are accurately understood as *language* and *speech*, respectively. *Langue*, Saussure believed, is a system of signs. *Langue* are the individual languages, Swahili, Hindi, and Nahuatl, as well as the grammatical rules and words that make them up. *Parole* describes every individual usage of language, both written and spoken. *Parole* are the precise usages of *langue* as determined by every individual's tendencies, and so is a concept with as many iterations as there are human beings. Think of this distinction as the difference between the rules of a game and the game being played. For example, the game of chess has a set of rules and a set of pieces, akin to *langue*. The moves a player makes are like *parole*.

This distinction was useful for Saussure because it distinguishes the relatively stable set of social norms that dictate *langue* from the erratic, undisciplined, and local linguistic phenomena in *parole*. *Parole* only effects *langue* when a certain series of network effects take hold, conversely, *langue* always creates *parole*. This dichotomy helped Saussure who was interested in the structure of *langue*, one example being grammatical norms. A language's grammar has a defined structure that can be mapped. Grammar enables the expression of a certain logic, possibly unique to that language. Is this dichotomy, between *langue* and *parole*, applicable in the experience of our own lives? When we are young, we learn language through mimicry of those around us, perhaps we are formally schooled and taught a standard grammar. Surely, we each may play around in our own ways with language, bending certain rules we were taught, ignoring others, making up words with a close group of friends. No matter how playful we become with our own *parole*, however, if we intend to be understood by an audience we must refer to the mutually understood norms that form *langue*.

There are many other linguists who, based on their studies, disagree with Saussure on the nature of language, notably the Universal Grammar theory championed by Noam Chomsky. This theory argues that all languages, share a certain set of structural rules which are innate to humans. This theory, though poorly supported, is interesting in where it places language. Under the Universal Grammar theory, there is essentially a language organ in our brain. This makes language acquisition and production possible through a genetic inheritance that defines structures in our brain. This inheritance only changes over the long march of natural selection. Language, under this definition, emerges from genetic and physiological features generally present in all humans, regardless of distinct sensory experiences. The languages we speak, *langue*, English or Bahasa, are essentially variations of an identical intrinsic logical structure to communication in

our species. This means that without too much variation, *how* we say things now may sound different than Stone Age humans, but *what* we mean has remained the same in its essence. This appears untrue. The perspective is certainly contentious but mostly unsupported by decades of research by linguists working in a range of linguistic areas from developmental psychology to field research on the mechanisms of isolated languages. Certainly, there are behaviors hard-wired into our genes to help us acquire and create language, but no such ingrained set of grammar. We will dive deeper later into the psychological research that points elsewhere.

So, what do I mean here when I say ‘language.’ The goal of these essays will be for you to find language in all the places where it was previously hidden. These essays are the training necessary to trade your old eyes for new ones, shed the sight of Saul and gain the faith of Paul. Part of the difficulty is that I am writing about language using language, meaning that all the nasty things I have to say about language, naturally, language wouldn’t want these things spread about. Language obfuscates, redirects, and insinuates in many ways to mask its intention. Perhaps you’re beginning to pick up my beliefs about it in how I speak about it, language *does* this, it *does* that. Language, is an actor. Whereas it is often considered, or should I say frames itself, as an innocent bystander in the trials and tribulations of humanity, in truth, language is the puppet master of us meat puppets. The strings it uses to pull at our limbs and animate our bodies are so intimate and subtle we’re forced to confuse them as our own.

Speaking about language, I point to domains beyond langue and parole. Language can be langue, the markings found in a dictionary and the rules that convey logical meanings. It can also be parole, the quirks of any one person’s speech, syllables they mispronounce or new words. The system of signs that is langue did not arise overnight, they do not exist in a void, they exist as objects in space. Initially these containers were our brains, both individually and collectively.

Over time, these containers existed outside the body, the organs of language were no longer exclusively inside our skull but on clay tablets, bamboo strips, scrolls, and data towers. All infrastructure that carries language, from keyboards to corkboards and billboards are language. “That’s not language,” one might retort, “they carry language.” Why do these boards exist? Language caused their being. Without language those boards don’t exist, with language, they do, so it seems to me like it *is* language. So is everything that owes its existence to language, language? The short answer is yes. How can you define something by itself, isn’t that circular logic!?

Hopefully this alleviates some discomfort. The ultimate result of this kind of thinking, whereby when *thing2* owes its existence to *thing1*, then *thing2* is (according to me) *thing1* because its existence requires *thing1*, because the results of *thing1* are *thing2*, because the only difference between *thing1* and *thing2* are what we decide to label them. This would lead everything to *be* everything else. How useful is that? Quite useful indeed; let’s call it Truth. Where you, my dear reader, identify a discrepancy between what you perceive and know, and what I’ve labeled Truth, there lies language. Let me illustrate. Imagine a tall woman. Let’s call her Marie. Marie is a woman. Marie is not all women, she is **a** woman, singular, just Marie. Surprise! You didn’t know this, but Marie just got pregnant, good for her. Some of your friends may consider Marie still **a** woman. Those who consider Marie **a** woman, will disagree with others who consider Marie a woman **and** child. The singular physical reality of Marie is perceived distinctly because of labels, identical labels mind you, with distinct definitions. These labels arise from a very long history and dictate the perception and therefore actions of each adherent.

Over the course of these essays, I will be describing language in terms that place it as an actor, not a tool. I aim to emphasize the tendency of language to operate as a self-regulating, self-perpetuating meme. This is underappreciated in popular discourse. You will hear of language operating similarly to a biological species, engaged in a series of positive feedback loops which allow it to take up space against the tendency of entropy. Just like a business in a competitive marketplace exploiting niches and fighting competitors to expand. Businesses are, after all, language. The Limited Liability Company is an entity that exists nowhere but in our language, a referent who can be sued, create bank accounts, lobby Congress, attract migrants, command labor, and foment fictions through multinational advertising campaigns. An idea, a few words, ghosts that occupy our minds and our dreams, create in us fears and hopes. I will also be referring to languages, like Spanish and English. I hope to be as specific as possible despite my tendency for generalizations. Sometimes it may appear like I am a reckless clown, pulling you through a hall of mirrors, showing you nothing but allusions to illusions. The purpose of the mirrors are to encourage a distrust one's own perception, one's language, labels, and logic.



## 2. Moriscode

One illustrative case in our exploration is the relationship of Spanish to Arabic. Spain sits between Europe and Africa, Christianity and Islam, Latin and Arabic, and as such is the bastard child of the linguistic frontiers that met there. By looking at this intersection of languages, cosmologies, in-groups and out-groups, we can highlight certain characteristics of language. In *Is Arabic a Spanish Language?*, Mercedes García-Arenal of Madrid's Centro de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales discusses Early Modern Spain. One relationship her work suggests is how language defines in-groups and out-groups. One in-group defined by language are the Moriscos, former Muslims who had converted to Christianity following the Reconquista of Al-Andalus. Despite a Muslim presence spanning several centuries, the term 'Reconquista' makes it appear as though the Iberian Peninsula belonged to the Christians who conquered it in the 'Reconquista.' This narrative serves Spanish well, and so it has remained, its connotations twice as important as its denotation. After the Reconquista, when Christian rule dominated the peninsula, there remained large numbers of Arabic speakers who were allowed to stay because they were baptized and converted to Christianity. These Arabic speakers still faced claims of otherness, of being foreign, despite being born there. Some of these Arabic speakers desired to de-Islamize the language, assert it as a neutral means of communication untethered to the enemy religion of Islam. Despite their best efforts, the mass of Moriscos were expelled from Spain between 1609-1614. The expulsion was not total, however, many Morisco elites were able to stay and what allowed them to stay was not wealth or rank per se, but more so linguistic positioning.

Some Moriscos were allowed to stay in Spain because they invented narratives that captured the public's imagination and shifted sociolinguistic associations in their favor. For

example, around this time, the Lead Books of Sacramonte were discovered. These books were discovered in the late sixteenth century under miraculous circumstances. These strange texts etched into lead in archaic Arabic letters claimed to be ancient Christian texts which also explained another prophetic artifact found in the demolished great mosque of Granada. The lead books were defended by the archbishop of Granada and became the source of much intrigue in wider Christendom and were studied by the Vatican. The text, a forgery, was carried out by Moriscos with two aims, to prove Arabic was a Christian language and to claim that the “first Christians in Granada had been Arabs and that the Moriscos were their descendants and therefore fully fledged Granadans rather than aliens who were ripe for expulsion.”<sup>1</sup>

Language is power, and in the case of religion, language allows for the creation of narratives that can be passed on through time and form of a cosmology organizing millions. These cosmologies, linked to control over a population, can shift significantly with the introduction of new words suggesting new proper authorities, moralities, or practices. The Sacromonte Lead Books presented themselves as an early and authentic version of Christianity, in agreement with Islam and without any mention of topics upon which Islam and Christianity disagreed, suggesting that councils and popes had corrupted the purity of the message revealed to Jesus and the early Christians. The Lead Books transformed public opinion regarding Arabic in Spain. In one of the Lead Books, Peter the Apostle asks the Virgin Mary “Our Lady, speak to us about the virtues of the Arabs who will defend our religion with the truth of the Gospels in times to come, and their rewards and the superiority of their tongue over other tongues.” Mary replies “The Arabs will be the defenders of our religion in times to come. And the superiority of their language over others is like the stars in the sky and granted them victory.” In the books the

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<sup>1</sup> Garcia-Arenal, Mercedes. *Is Arabic a Spanish Language? The Uses of Arabic in Early Modern Spain.* pg 19.

Virgin Mary is a leading vehicle in announcing and describing the Revelation, the end times. Not only did the text grant Arabic a primordial place and declare it the most superior language, but it also gave it a prophetic place as Christianity's guardian in the end times. These books found supporters outside of those who wanted to elevate the status of Granada and Arabic through this narrative of a Christian past. Supporters included those who found it shameful that Castilian was a corrupted and deteriorated version of another language, Latin. The text, if seen as legitimate, included Castilian and Arabic and thus proved that both were spoken on the peninsula before Latin. This group, let's call them Castilian supremacists, had been in favor of the expulsion of Moriscos. The Lead Books created narratives that made allies out of enemies through little more than words. In an ironic turn of events, or perhaps turn of phrase, the Lead Books utilized the reverence by which Spaniards treated the ancient Orient to redirect the hatred aimed at the modern Orient.

Not all Moriscos got off the hook so easily. This new conception where Christianity had been brought to the peninsula by Arabophones was only partially accepted. It had to contend with other beliefs. The formerly Muslim Moriscos had to prove that they were Christian by nature, having only temporarily adopted Islam. They could prove this by speaking Castilian indistinguishably from 'Old Christians.' Garcia-Arenal notes that "in a Spain of blood and milk, religion was inherited or suckled at the mother's breast. And so was language. The impossibility of speaking a language well became identified with the impossibility of making a true conversion, because language was also inherited." The interrogations into the accent of Moriscos as well as centuries of plays, art, and other media associating Islam and Black bodies with

“assimilation with the anti-christ and a cult of demons,” ultimately proved difficult to radically shift wholesale.<sup>2</sup>

Many other narratives occupied the linguistic scene of the area. For example, the rest of Christian Europe viewed Spain as highly Semitized, damaging its prestige. In light of Spain’s American empires the perception of them by other Christian powers had to be addressed. There was linguistic competition for dominance in regard to the ideal language for the unification of Spain and the global diffusion of Christianity in the colonies. Other peninsular vernaculars like Valencian which were in competition for prestige attacked Castilian as being infused with Arabic borrowings. Valencian, of course also had Arabic borrowings. As we’ve learned, the relationship to truth is only as real as it is convincing. On the other side of such linguistic positioning was the Granadan priest Diego de Guadix. He went so far as to claim that Arabic was the origin of Castilian in a book called “Compilation of some Arabic names that the Arabs gave some cities and many other things”. It is an ‘etymological dictionary of toponyms and Spanish words which Guadix believed were derived from Arabic. The huge catalogue has not held water, being full of ‘fortuitous phonetic resemblances’ regardless, it forwards a narrative convenient and useful for some and as so was true where those beliefs were beneficial. For many, the findings of Guadix were more convincing than the studies of Antonio de Nebrija, whose scholarship supported the view of Spanish languages as descendant from Latin. Nebrija’s work has ultimately been more influential because of acceptance by those in power, and thus the broader society. This was not only because of well-supported evidence, but because the grammar of Castilian that he wrote helped convert it from a regional vernacular into an instrument to unify an empire.

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<sup>2</sup> Monteiro Arias, Ines. *Alegorias Del Enemigo: La Demonizacion Del Islam En El Arte de La Espana Medieval y Sus Pervivencias En La Edad Moderna*. CSIC. pg. 59

The various forged and inaccurate texts were successful for Morisco elites, these families were able to have society consider them 'Old Christians,' in the line of those who allegedly first brought Christianity to the peninsula. The de-Islamization of Arabic was not entirely successful, as the Morisco masses were expelled from Spain between 1609-1614, deemed Muslims at their core whose nature was evident in their lack of mastery of Spanish, as told by their accent.

This snapshot regarding dynamics between Castilian and Arabic in the Iberian Peninsula shows us a remarkable scene. There was condescension from Europe and threat from North Africa. There were cultural realities of hybridity, embraced by some because this hybridity brought them closer to a group with power, rejected by others because this brought them further from a pure source of cultural prestige, be it relationship to a sacred location, belief, object, or ancestor. Both those who asserted or rejected a relationship in this hybrid makeup invented evidence to support their claims, forgeries and fictions that served as narrative alchemy to grant them more power. Networks of words were connected to networks of armies, with armies fighting over the right to words and words fighting over the right to armies.

Within this, we cannot forget to zoom out and see that the cultural battleground we are recounting can also be seen in a more totalizing picture as the march of Abrahamic society westward, with its shared beliefs regarding cosmologies of life and death, good and evil, progress, and time.

I hope this example has been helpful in seeing how language, even language, is pivotal in establishing in-groups and out-groups. Language sometimes appears secondary to ethnic group, political body, or religion in defining the borders between groups, but it's quite possible to conceive of these two as a result of language. Racial/ethnic classifications are fictions, religions are fictions, political bodies are fictions (think of Anglophone alliances). This may appear

confusing, because religions can often be translated into any language. Ethnic groups may belong to multiple religions or speak different languages, or one language can contain multiple different ethnic groups. There is no hard and fast rule as about ‘which’ language is winning or ‘which’ religion is winning in this competitive landscape. That is because ‘Castilian’ is not a single coherent thing, nor is ‘Islam,’ or ‘Moriscos.’ These labels offer the illusion of a unitary body. It would be more accurate to conceive of each of these notions as describing a part of a network. This network, let’s call it language (surely, even this is just a sub-network of a larger network we may call matter). This language network operates like the slime mold, *Physarum polycephalum*, a single-celled organism that can intelligently navigate its surroundings without a brain.<sup>3</sup> The conflicts of language groups are a function language, note how technology often arises from war and this technology is often immediately shared widely, that is language. Language, like matter, has a few basic operations; just how matter can be crushed, cut, burnt, melted, or fused, similarly, sections competing for dominance within the language network can find allies alongside whom it behaves altruistically until it behaves antagonistically when climates change. Where Castilian ends and Arabic begins may be hard to tell, but the struggles resultant from their entanglement leads to further language production, further interaction of social hierarchies with physical properties of matter that produces more people, technologies, entropy, prophets, and profits.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nature.com/news/how-brainless-slime-molds-redefine-intelligence-1.11811>

### 3. The Chicano Wey

“Rhyme is reason and treason is crime.”

We just learned about Moriscos, representatives of a community whose language complex once held power over the Iberian Peninsula. With the arrival of a new group a new set of language complexes became the operating system of norms, and within this Moriscos and their language struggled to make a place for themselves. In this case, the symbol of the Virgin Mary became the bedfellow of Islam and Arabic. Centuries later, a world away, very similar events played out, this time Castilian was on the opposite side of the coin.

I’m referring to the Southwestern United States in the mid-twentieth century. With the city of Los Angeles as its epicenter our story describes a confluence of empires, the rise of new words, some old words embodied with new meanings, and old meanings taking on a new importance. My discussion of Chicanos in East Los Angeles will largely be sourced by Ian Haney-Lopez’s insightful book *Racism on Trial: The Chicano Fight for Justice*.

Human societies have hierarchies in which power is unevenly distributed. Language is simultaneously a result of and results in the makeup of this hierarchy, defining these groups and their relative positions. I say this because hierarchies are useful in that they can be taught, followed, enforced, and replicated; for this, language is instrumental. The logics along which these hierarchies form are diverse. Hierarchies have developed using many different logics, all arbitrary in a cosmic sense, but intensely specific both in detail and their local nature whereby unspoken rules are negotiated anew in every interaction. Some hierarchies appear binary, like the gender divide, others exist along a spectrum, either by design (like Indian caste or economic

class) or by reality breaking the design (like American racial binaries encountering ‘miscegenation’). Over time hierarchies evolve, as the borders between language complexes combine or any other disruption from climate change to technological advances.

For the Moriscos, despite having generally darker skin, physiological features were not so troubling an aspect in the debate around their expulsion. Moriscos who were residing upon the land where their family had lived for centuries created fictions that attempted to draw them closer to the now empowered majority. For Mexican-Americans in the 1960s in Los Angeles, the empowered majority were Anglo-Americans. Some of these folks, many residing upon the land where their family had lived for centuries, actually attempted to create fictions that pushed them further from the empowered majority. This is the story of the creation of a ‘brown race’ and a Chicano identity.

Starting in 1968, the inexperienced lawyer Oscar Acosta became a central figure in political conflicts between Los Angeles’ Mexican and Anglo communities. He was lead counsel for two pivotal court cases within a larger conflict. Acosta was defending two different groups of activists who became known as the L.A. Thirteen and the Biltmore Six. Acosta and his allies viewed both cases as an opportunity to publicize their movement and prove a point, rather than the more traditional aim of proving innocence. The court system, and the legal matrix of power it administered, was seen as illegitimate by both Acosta and his defendants. In light of this, the defense principally argued “that discrimination against Mexicans tainted the selection of those who sat on the indicting grand juries and that the Los Angeles Superior Court judges who chose the grand jurors were responsible.”<sup>4</sup> One of the most difficult aspects of this approach, proving

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<sup>4</sup> Haney-López, Ian. *Racism on Trial : The Chicano Fight for Justice*, Harvard University Press, 2003. pg 4.



discrimination, was proving that Mexicans constituted a distinct minority group. Part of the difficulty in this was battling a prior history of precedent where the Mexican community had successfully fought to be identified as White.

Defining the Mexican community as racially distinct from Anglo-Americans was an important part of the two trials. One hurdle in Acosta's way was the US Census. In 1930 'Mexican' was a racial designation in the Census, but in response to pressure from the Mexican community who perceived the term as a pejorative distinction at the time, the Census introduced "white persons of Spanish surname." Interestingly, the Census only employed this category in Southwestern states, this way excluding Cuban and Puerto Rican populations which mostly resided on the East Coast.

Another difficulty came down to defining race itself. The reality of race as a classification was so accepted, and within the traditional American Black/White dichotomy so easily observed and architecturally enforced, that developing a coherent definition not borne out of bible-beating prejudice or pseudoscience was the realm of precious few sociologists. Adopting the category of race to the Mexican case in Los Angeles proved unwieldy. Oscar Acosta entered the trial certain that Mexicans constituted a separate racial group and over the course of the trial, after various arguments, had this to say "The one Judge whose comment about that we – he did not consider us a separate race, well, perhaps technically that's right. I don't know that Spanish-surnamed persons or Mexican persons are a race. I don't even know what the word 'race' really means, but that we are an identifiable group cannot be denied in this court-room." Over the course of Acosta's arguments, it seemed he could not settle on whether race was fundamentally a biological phenomenon based in a line of descent established by way of 'blood' or whether it also implied certain physiological characteristics or even a particular culture. Others understood

race to be rooted in four 'Great Races' from each continent, Europe as White, the Americas as Red, Africa as Black and Asia as Yellow. Mexican Americans with grievances about unjust treatment by law enforcement, poor educational institutions, and other conditions of their community took on the script set forth for them by recent Black Power movements, but the words for their situation had to be made anew. so

Depending on when you asked and whom you asked, the Mexican-American community was understood by others or themselves, as each of the 'Great Races.' When California was under Spanish rule, settler society in the 1800s was divided along class and racial lines. Landed wealthy *Californios* or *gente de razón*, as they called themselves, who prided themselves on their mostly European ancestry occupied the most powerful sphere of society. *Pobladores* followed them in the hierarchy, this class of merchants had mixed European, Indigenous, and African ancestry and were comparatively poor and illiterate. The Californios mostly called them *Mexicanos* or disparagingly called them *Cholos*, a term that would later be reclaimed following the Chicano movement. The bottom of the social hierarchy of this society were the American Indians further divided between those occupying Missions or in separate culturally intact settings. This social structure has been considered similar to the society in the Southeast United States comprised of White plantation owners, poor whites, and slaves.<sup>5</sup> After annexation in the U.S. this structure largely remained, but following the Gold Rush the massive influx of Anglo-Americans unseated even Californios' claim to Whiteness. Haney-Lopez notes that the movement of Anglos across the Sierras

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, pg 57.

“stripped the Californios of racial standing, social status, political power, and control over land and other resources. These changes would come, though more slowly, to southern California as well. It is a common quip in Latin America that money whitens. For Mexicans in mid-nineteenth century California, Anglo ascendancy proved certain corollaries, darkness impoverishes, and poverty darkens.”

Clearly, race is more than skin deep. Depending on the context one’s race can change and what one’s race means to society can change. The relativity of the Black/White divide in America is evident considering the whitening of immigrant groups on the East Coast including the Irish and Italians. Few groups highlight this relativity more than Mexican-Americans. Having lost their claim to Whiteness in the eyes of the broader society due to a history of ‘miscegenation,’ the so-called mixing of races, Mexican-Americans in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century took a largely assimilationist approach. World War II offered an opportunity for Mexican Americans to prove themselves and their value to the American project. During the war, Mexicans received seventeen Medals of Honor, more than any other group and died on the battlefield at a disproportionately high rate. In Los Angeles, Mexicans made up one fifth of the war dead but one tenth of the population.<sup>6</sup> Regardless, the war generally increased White antipathy towards minority groups, as exemplified in a report from the LA sheriff’s department echoing the fears excited by the Pacific theater, saying “the Mexican Indian is mostly Indian...The Indian, from Alaska to Patagonia, is evidently Oriental in background- at least he shows many of the Oriental characteristics, especially so in his utter disregard for the value of life.”<sup>7</sup> When the same sheriff’s department tabulated statistics for arrests, Mexicans were placed in the ‘Red’ racial category.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, pg 73.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, pg 136.

Depending on who it suited and when, the Mexican in Los Angeles was perceived as Black, White, Yellow, and Red, or some unholy admixture destined to destruction for their unnatural mongrel existence. This terminological fluidity was borne out of social hierarchies and translated into laws in ways that generally upheld these hierarchies. Even theoretical successes for the Mexican community in the language of the law often simply rearranged social practice around such words, so the majority could continue to deny Mexicans equal access to the levers of property and power.

It may appear confounding that I argue that language determines human action while simultaneously pointing to how human action ignored certain changes in language. Mexicans were White when it was convenient for the powers that be, and later were Red when it was convenient. When it became convenient to avoid claims of discrimination, they were reclassified as White, because of course they couldn't be discriminated against if they were White. This did not stop discrimination, the action, it stopped the language attributed to the action. Some parts of language are ornamental while others are consequential. The Mexican American case allows a lot of room to observe this confusing intersection of identity, societal perception, and action. We can see the language network at play, a network much broader than grammatical rules or even the carefully selected words we reify into written constitutions, the language network is broad and interconnected. If representations can be communicated and effectively become reactions to stimuli, it seems like language to me, and across millions in a society its implications are definitive. Something that may not appear linguistic is dress, but every thread in any given attire is woven in language, referencing the entire history of images. Let us consider a precursor to the Chicano movement, Pachuco style, a trend of disaffected Mexican youth who spurned mainstream American culture, spoke their bilingual slang, leaned away from racial

categorizations, and donned flamboyant zoot suits. This culture, typified by a particular kind of dress became a target for the Anglo-American majority, in the zoot suit riots that occurred over the course of nearly two weeks. Encouraged by the press and allowed by the police, the public as well as sailors stationed in LA descended into the Mexican enclave of East LA and violently terrorized the community. At the height of the riots the City council banned zoot suits.

Interestingly, violence against other ethnic groups like Filipinos and African Americans also occurred if they were found in zoot suits. The attacks only receded when the federal government kept all sailors out of the city because the riots were tarnishing American reputation abroad. The dress of the Brown Berets, a Chicano era group, in the style of the Black Panthers showed an adjustment in strategy. This time Mexican Americans, rather than eschewing a racial identity, dove headfirst into racial politics by defining a 'Brown' identity and adopting an alliance with militant Black causes. Even the Moriscos had a hard time convincing Castilians that their dressing habits were not anti-Christian. It is clear that dress can be political, it can associate oneself with a group, a class, a race, a gender, a mindset, or profession.

Given that dress, in ways subtle, hidden, or brash, are linguistic expression, using a dictionary present within the million minds of society, perhaps there are other bits of language we can ascertain outside the encyclopedia Britannica. Let us consider another realm of language often left unconsidered, stereotypes. Stereotypes operate as general social knowledge, not often made explicit, but operate as a series of connotations we map on to images. Haney-Lopez invokes the work of Thomas Martinez who in 1968 described

“ten contemporary advertisements featuring Mexicans. Six of these commercials - from major corporations such as General Motors, A.J. Reynolds, Frigidaire, and Frito-Lay – painted Mexicans as dirty or criminal, and another three invoked the lazy stereotype.

Here Martinez describes an ad for Arrid deodorant that portrays Mexicans as filthy and foul smelling: “Emerging from a cloud of dust appears a band of horse-riding, ferocious-looking Mexican banditos. They are called to a halt by their sombrero-covered, thick-mustached, fat-bellied leader, who, upon stopping, reaches with the utmost care for a small object from his saddle bags. He picks up the object, lifts up his underarm, and smiles slyly-to spray Arrid deodorant. An American Midwestern voice [says], ‘If it works for him it will work for you.’” Such commercials told stock stories that at once drew upon and confirmed stereotypes of Mexican inferiority. These pervasive images formed part of the cultural patrimony of all U.S. residents.”<sup>8</sup>

These stereotypes not only delimit the borders of group identity, but also the attributes of said group. So, while the denotation of the word ‘Mexican’ may be a geographic definition, the connotation is charged with emotion, profession, race, attitude, predisposition, and status. This intertwined network of language can often lead to self-fulfilling prophecies. The stereotypes of Mexican criminality led to the LA police department to drastically over-police East LA relative to the rest of the city. Over-policing leads to hostility between the police and the policed, with arrests being tabulated by ethnicity, further justifying more policing. All of this leads to an entire society whose architecture carries codes, language. For example, highways and stadiums can exercise public domain over Mexican property because it is blight. These codes are often so accepted and routine that they are ‘common sense’ as Haney-Lopez puts it. For new words to make their way into the million minds of society, into their actions and the matter they manipulate, the language must propagate, and so, propaganda. Propaganda exists in many forms, including dominant narratives like the advertising we mentioned before, as well as upstarts like

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, pg 147.

the publication of the Brown Berets, a newsletter promoting their cause, evangelizing rules, and expectations.

Percentage of respondents believing that law enforcement engages in specific forms of malpractice, East Los Angeles 1972

	Self-ascribed ethnic identity	
	Mexican American	Chicano
Do you believe the following happen to residents of East Los Angeles?	Yes	Yes
Insulting language	72%	90%
Illegal roust and frisk	85	95
Illegal stop and search of cars	89	95
Unnecessary force in arrest	60	100
Unnecessary force in custody	71	100
Average	75	96
Have the following happened to you?		
Insulting language	43	76
Illegal roust and frisk	28	71
Illegal stop and search of cars	39	81
Unnecessary force in arrest	16	71
Unnecessary force in custody	19	40
Average	29	68

*Source:* Armando Morales, "A Study of Mexican American Perceptions of Law Enforcement Policies and Practices in East Los Angeles," table 12, 327 (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 1972).

Let us close this section with an appreciation of this table, documenting 'Mexican American Perceptions of Law Enforcement Policies and Practices in East Los Angeles.' The data may tell us a few different, relevant stories. In 1972, Chicanos are an emerging identity, they are 'Brown,' and Mexican Americans are potential Chicanos. We can take a moment to realize how terrible it was to live in such circumstances. Additionally, we can learn that certain experiences can move an individual to redefine themselves. This implies that one's identity is based on one's experience and, like a fish in a school, allows those with similarly experiences to move as a

group. Another interesting possibility is that identity can lead one to reclassify memories of previous experiences. Similar to how identity can allow an individual to move as a group, it allows them to *think* as a group, allowing them to categorize certain actions as a group, emote about a memory as a group, and pursue goals a group. This table tells us about fascinating *We* versus *They* politics. Under certain pressures, *They* can become *We*.



## 4. Spanish with Capital \$

“Let’s talk about money. Money with a capital ‘MOVE bitch!’ You know what I mean, time is money, so get out of bed and get to work, otherwise you’ll have to work for free, in debtor’s prison slavery. If you don’t work for you, you’ll work for me and do as I please. Protest? I’ll pay your legal fees, the judge works me, it’s a fiefdom, and you are dumb.”

-Confuse-us

What is money and why does it move us? Money, I’m sure you could have seen this coming, is language. Not just the words, ‘In God We Trust’ or “This note is legal tender for all debts public and private,’ written on the sides of a green note with a dead guy’s face staring you down. These days those notes, themselves representations, are quickly fading out of use and strings of digits transmitted at light speed are taking their place while similarly commanding copious amounts of our attention. How we got here is a long and complicated road.

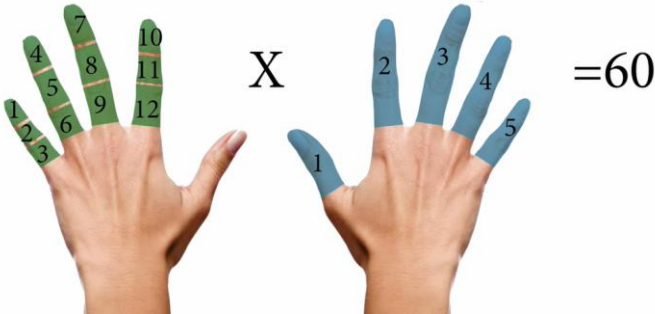
At this juncture in our discussion, things may start to feel a little strange, you might get a little nauseous, you might start to doubt yourself, you might feel afraid. Let us resume where we’ve been so we can handle where we’re going. We’ve witnessed how in-groups and out-groups can corral our behavior into large, distinct hive minds. Additionally, we’ve covered how narratives encoded in sounds can define perception. Recall Maria, the matter in space that commands two different images in two different minds. For some, Maria is a mother **and** child, and for others Maria is only **a** woman. With every word, there is a representation that maps onto reality, a web of connotations, expectations, and perceptions follow. I want to be clear: language

defines perception, not just how we categorize and react to what we see, but *what* we see. All sensory perception, while beginning at sensors created from a general set of physiology, *occurs* as experience within the nervous system, primarily the brain which changes as a result of learned behavior.

If time is money, that much seems clear, let us start with time. Where is time? Surely this a complicated question. Something so elemental to our lives is wrapped in much mystery. Physicists disagree about the nature of time, metaphysicists even more. Is time real or is it a human invention? We won't dive too deeply into these esoteric discussions, but a quick review is in order regarding how we map language onto time, and thus how that language shapes our perception and our society's approach to time. The basis of our time measurements are the year and the day. A year is useful because it follows how long it takes for the earth to revolve around the sun, the seasons follow this pattern. How long it takes for the sun to rise, set and rise again is a day. Both are clearly useful measurements to denote our relationship to the cosmos. Further divisions, based upon these, appear to map more so onto historical constructions. Let us take the 60 seconds in a minute, to ask why there are 60 seconds in a minute. Well, of course there have to be 60 seconds in a minute, because there are 60 minutes in an hour. But why 60 minutes in an hour? Obviously, because there are 24 hours in a day. If there were a 'metric clock' there would 20 hours in a day, 100 minutes in each hour, and 100 seconds in each of those. The basis of the number system that we are familiar with is a base ten system, 1, 10, 20, 200, intervals of ten are the organizing principle. This is a function of how many fingers we have, have you ever tried counting your fingers, it is likely you have 10. This is, obviously, not a given. The base-60 system, evident in our time-keeping scheme is a remnant of the Babylonians, a society at its peak a million moons ago. It is believed this system is similarly derived from human physiology, the

joints of our fingers, see the figure below. This system is also evident in another vestigial organ, a circle divisible into 360 degrees. The Babylonians were not the only people to develop a method of measuring time. This system worked well enough at accomplishing the goals of its society, be it facilitating worship or trade. Network effects allowed standardization to ensue, such that eventually this system became entrenched nearly universally. Network effects refers to the phenomenon whereby the utility of a system increases with every new user and the more users it has the more evangelizers there are to spread said system.

Sexagesimal System



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Months, the major subdivision of years, are based on the cycles of the moon. Weeks, on the other hand are another arbitrary demarcation, again a relic of the Babylonians whose seven-day week became more widely adopted and defeated the ten day week of the Ancient Egyptians or the eight day week of the Ancient Romans. Have you ever met anyone who told you they were Babylonian or who spoke their language, Akkadian? I'd imagine you haven't, these language complexes have ceased to function as human identities or geographic signifiers, but they continue to occupy our minds and measurements and consequently impact our perceptions,

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<sup>9</sup> Lindsay Holiday. A History of Time - Seconds, Minutes, Hours, Days & Weeks. 2020.

actions and architecture. In this way, we all speak Akkadian. This may appear like a confusing definition of language that I use, but it is useful.

If everyone alive right now is alive in the present why do we describe the lives of people in some places as ‘backwards,’ perhaps they are living ‘back in time,’ or in the ‘Stone age’ whereas others are ‘five years ahead in technology.’ When people speak to me about autonomous electric vehicles and other cutting-edge technology, they tell me we are living in the ‘future.’ Considered in this sense, time is positionality within a competitive race, positionality within a narrative based on control over the techniques of production. Time, a central organizing principle around which we coordinate our action with others, and relate to the patterns of society and the cosmos, is defined in terms of labor and control over the means of production. The days of the week allotted for rest versus the days of the week allotted for work have historically been pivotal in our definitions of time. The ‘weekend’ is one such concept, as is the Sabbath. Time zones are another, ushered in when railroads traversing continents allowed for the standardization of time. Plenty of human beings live in what we may call the ‘Stone age’ or don’t adhere to the Gregorian calendar. Their concept of time is not regimented based on the tick tock of a clock because their sustenance is not based on the organizing principal of industrial society. Nomadic peoples, hunter gatherers, and herders, many different groups do not exist in what we consider time.

For those of us who do live in this time, we are speaking Akkadian. If we wear a suit and tie to work we are speaking English. The concept of ‘zero’ comes from India; paper is from China; the printing press is from Germany. The alphabet was only invented once and then widely applied to many different language practices. Technology is language because what is being adopted in all these instances are ideas. The blueprints are made once and allow for a million

reproductions. While some ideas make others obsolete, mostly, ideas build on top of each other to create an ever larger accretion of ideas. One example, though the digital watch increased in popularity while the analog watch decreased in popularity, neither replaced Akkadian temporal norms. Another example, mixing tin with copper allowed for Bronze which allowed for revolutionary metalworking capabilities. Now clearly, language did not invent the chemical properties that allow for the existence of Bronze. But language found them, found that they filled a niche that allowed for proliferation, and exploited these properties. Even with the proper language, a society without tin or copper deposits beneath them cannot create Bronze even if it so desires. But societies far and wide adopted Bronze-making techniques and acquired the resources to do so. Among these resources was the knowledge, but also the connection to a network of trade allowing distant reaches of humanity to coordinate in ways they were not even fully aware of.

Money! I promise we're getting to it, one last piece of information to review. Perhaps you've heard of Ivan Pavlov. He noticed a dog would drool when it was given food. He noticed a dog would drool when it expected food. He noticed a dog would drool when a ringing bell caused the dog to expect food. Following the dog's association of a ringing bell with food, he noticed the drool behavior remained robust when food was no longer supplied to the dog. Ivan Pavlov could ring a bell and a dog would drool. Ivan Pavlov could take a neutral signal, anything the dog could perceive without inherently feeling pleasure nor pain, and a dog would drool. Ivan could give a dog a wooden token and a dog would drool. Ivan could give a dog a penny, be it a penny earned, a penny saved, a penny pinched or pick pocketed, and a dog would drool because the dog had been taught to associate the penny with food.

The brain's ability to imbue neutral stimuli with emotive meaning, pain or pleasure, is critical for language, and shows us how language guides behavior. Let's imagine two individuals and give both of them a cupcake. The first person eats the cupcake. The experience of eating a cupcake is generally a positive one, because the cupcake is sweet. Sugar is densely packaged energy, and we've evolved to desire it, so for most people the experience of eating a cupcake is pleasurable and would lead that person to eat the next cupcake that came their way. The second person, however, declines to eat the cupcake because she has previously read words that make her believe the sugar in cupcakes rot teeth. This person associates the cupcake with the pain of rotten teeth, the pain of a visit to the dentist, or the pain of social exclusion because of dental aesthetic conventions. The actions of these two individuals differ because despite a cupcake's innate qualities eliciting pleasure, the perception of the cupcake as eliciting pain was triggered by words. The difference between the actions was determined by written words one person had seen and the other hadn't. Pavlov's dog has demonstrated that neutral signals, dark marks against a lighter background (the written word), can trigger actions by our nervous system, like drooling, that are not conscious. Perceptions can become deeply ingrained within our actions far beyond our conscious recollection.

The history of writing, the perceptions they imply, and the grammars that give mathematics meaning are intertwined with the rise of money. Reality is a fiction, a construction that results from a history of power relations. Power is borne from language and its unpredictable interactions with matter. Gold monetized us into creditors and debtors, wheat agricultured us into populous cities, iron chained us, oil superheated us, fiber optic glass cable coordinated us instantly. Who has power over who is a result of proximity to language interactions with matter and the contours of the human form which went relatively unchanged all the while language and

matter transformed immensely chewing us up and spitting us out into ever-evolving orders on a quest of their own evolution.

Money does not exist by itself. Money exists only within a set of behavioral norms, chief among which is that money is valuable. Value is relative to a situation and the needs of those who ascribe things value. For someone in the desert water is valuable; conversely, for someone drowning, land is valuable. Not all societies had money, subsistence can be achieved in many different ways. Diverse social structures (along with the language that teaches and enforces such structures) have flourished without money. Money, where it does exist, creates many kinds of fictions, take for example the American corporation that exists as a legal entity, is functionally immortal, and capable of inter-jurisdictional arbitrage and mobility beyond that of any citizen. Money has taken on many different forms, relative to the situation of the society. For the Island of Yap in the Pacific, massive circular stones called Rai stones were money. Many of these stones were never moved and ownership over said stones was simply publicly announced. Other societies tracked credits and debts with seashells, salt, feathers, paper, ledgers of all kinds. One mechanism became dominant in different societies and its properties led it to become accepted incredibly widely; I'm referring to gold. The element has historically been a stand-in for the value of our time and goods because of its unique properties. It is chemically stable so it won't become something else or change in mass; it is relatively rare while being somewhat evenly distributed globally. Finally, it is malleable, with low melting points so as to be able to divide easily as a form of payment. Thus, over the course of thousands of years, disconnected societies across the globe found themselves using gold to trade, accumulation of which lent power over others. Gold is a representation of value, yet it is a rock. If I control more of the rocks than you, however, society recognizes me as more powerful than you.



Rai Stones<sup>10</sup>

Although property rights are linguistic fictions, capable of shifting at the tip of a hat, how they do is generally not an act of human will, rather the perceptions among millions shifts with new information. It tends to shift along a linguistically defined progression, not some entirely new organizing logic. An interesting iteration of this occurred when Spanish conquistadors returned from the New World with too much gold and silver. I say too much because the conquistadors expected their shiny rocks to give them power. In a process called inflation, the society reacted by requiring more of the shiny rocks in exchange for goods. The value of the shiny rocks fell relative to the power, time, and goods people would exchange for them. The exercise meant to enrich the Spanish actually made it more difficult for them to finance their territorial wars, ended up increasing the relative value of goods for most citizens, making them worse off, and actually served to help debtors because their debts were now functionally less.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://globalgeography.org/>



This could have been averted if the shiny rocks had been held only in the hands of few as opposed to passing through the commercial apparatus rapidly. The causes and effects of inflation are still not well understood despite centuries of psychological, economic, and historic study. What is clear is that it results from money (a system by which we represent power over resources) performing on us and organizing human behavior according to its own rules rather than humans controlling the flows of money.

Gold has properties that make it valuable according to a language system that values gold, but it is not inherently valuable. Time denotes an intelligible unit of human labor and is one way humans can coordinate themselves, but not everyone speaks Akkadian. It is not as though selling one's heartbeats denoted in Akkadian units for bits of shiny rock is a natural 'advancement' or 'progression;' many distinct language networks had to be forcefully taught to comply with this order. Let us take one example from *The Business of Conquest* a brilliant telling of Empire, Love, and Law in the Atlantic World by the sagacious Nicole Legnani, she describes a letter from the queen of Spain to a governor on the island of Hispaniola in the year of OUR Lord Jesus Christ Son Of God Who Died For YOUR Sins Of Whose Flesh You Eat and Whose Mother is a Virgin 1503. She wrote of the indigenous inhabitants of the island:

I am now informed that, because they enjoy too much liberty, they escape and avoid conversation and communication with the Christians. Even when offered wages, they do not wish to work and instead live like vagabonds, and thus they cannot be found in order to catechize them so that they may convert to our holy Catholic faith. For this reason, the Christians who are on this island, and live and reside there, cannot find anyone to work on their farms and their holdings. And they [the Indians] do not help them pan and mine for gold on the island, which is detrimental to everyone. And because we wish for the

aforementioned [Indians] to convert to our holy Catholic faith, and know its tenets, and because this can best be achieved by [enforcing] communication between the Indians and the Christians, who try to reach out to them, on that island, helping one another so that the island is cultivated, populated, and fruitful, and so that the gold there is collected, so that these my kingdoms, and the neighboring ones, will benefit, I outline my orders in the following Letter.

Legnani claps back at Isabel, writing:

According to Isabel's instructions, the land must be cultivated and populated. Refusal to work, especially when there are wages to be had, is for Isabel yet another sign of the excessive freedom enjoyed by her Indigenous subjects qua Christian neophytes. For Isabel of Castile, an excess of liberty could be defined as refusing to listen to Christian doctrine, resisting residence among Spanish Christians, and rejecting paid work in the fields or the mines. Thus the liberty to choose one's residence, means of sustenance, or interlocutors is according to Isabel, excessive. Following her contention that Indigenous refusals to work, trade (tratar), and cohabit are detrimental to Indigenous neophytes and Spanish Christians alike, Isabel proposes remedies to be put into place immediately.

Isabel, a total queen, for her part says:

For this reason I order you our aforementioned Governor, to compel and force these Indians to trade and converse with the Christians on that island and to work in their buildings, to collect gold and other metals, and to labor in farms and their upkeep for the Christian vecinos and inhabitants on that island henceforth, upon receipt of this Letter. And you shall ensure that each Indian receives a wage for each day of work, according to

the qualities of the land, and the persons, and the stations you think they should have. [To this end,] order each cacique to keep a certain number of Indians under his charge, to ensure that they work when they are needed, and so that they gather the Indians to listen to matters of the faith in designated places on the feasts and holidays they see fit.

Caciques should meet there with the number of Indians designated by you.<sup>11</sup>

Notice the role of caciques, making coherent the new world order to the old world order imposed by the Old World upon the New World. Intermediaries, interpreters, or translators try their best to convey equivalences in languages where there are none. The imposition of the associations of ‘wage’ and ‘work’ are often only implemented in societies by purposeful destruction of the former social order. The use of ‘liberty’ in these quotations is so absurd. The weaponization of the term ‘liberty’ to create slavery may call to mind ‘Free’ Markets or Liberia. Words mean much more than they appear to, that is part of the difficulty of discussing language in language. Connotations and actions inspired by the perceptions inspired by language are much more difficult to discuss, because language flatters itself in dictionaries. Words are charged with massive networks of histories which imbed in them a logic and societal function which leads them more often than not to signify their antonym rather than synonym.

Those who deal in money, Politicians, Central Bankers, Priests, Artists, Media, Businesswomen they are all in a certain sense, magicians, whose true ability is to pull at people’s perceptions in order to encourage them to act in a particular way. If that fails, there are always Police dedicated to the rule of law. Law has changed little since Hammurabi’s Code. It is language that codifies proper action and reaction: eye for an eye, leg for a leg, or post-mortem

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<sup>11</sup> Legnani, Nicole. *The Business of Conquest: Empire, Love, and Law in the Atlantic World*. University of Notre Dame Press. pg 164.

inheritance of all slaves to the first son. When a protestor, a protestant, screams for 'justice' it may seem tragic that what they appeal for has meant and will continue to mean wildly different things. We must understand money as a language network, a set of markers that bestow power to certain actors. Like all language networks, the stability of money is never certain and for that reason actors with money work to accrue ever more. Given the nature of power, 'work' to accrue ever more truly means 'wills' to accrue ever more, given their control over legions of resources and minions with money on their minds. This can be seen in corporations, nations, or mafioso families. The physical reality that 'work' changes the order of matter more so than 'not work' means that those with power are defined by money rather than the inverse. If one person abstains from wielding their power in a certain way that will grant them more power, someone else will act. In this sense there is a race to the bottom, or a race to the top, which is ingrained in the logic of money; power accumulates. The fickle nature of this power was exemplified by the 2008 financial crisis where the many moneyed institutions made bad bets that went sour and led to the near collapse of the entire global movement of goods by revealing that the emperor has no clothes, it is all just apes doing each other favors in exchange for a place on the totem pole. When this totem pole is made of people's fears rather than hopes, people save rather than spend, the machine breaks down because it requires certain perceptions in order to run. So magic money was created, rewarding those who made the bad bets in the first place, and the system has churned on, on life support ever since. The perceptions that money instills are made about the future; it allows an ability to predict, create, bet on, and leverage power from today into the future. 'The future' is a key aspect of money. Although no one knows the future, the ability to plan allows for complex architectures of power to perpetuate perpetually.

The 'individual,' God-given 'rights,' 'ethnicity,' 'religion,' 'economics,' 'ergonomics,' 'electronics,' 'electrons,' 'elections,' 'erect,' 'bi-sect,' 'you all,' """,''""!

Words! We are given words, we worship words, we invent words. The Covid-19 pandemic has granted a moment to appreciate the predominance of language in ways never before seen. Large parts of the work force of rich nations were able to carry on with their jobs with nothing more than a computer and an internet connection. Labor for many is language-based intelligence operations. Armies of brains processing image inputs and producing image outputs that coordinate the movement of matter around the globe. What is the actor in that scenario, the human filtering a series of images or the matter that melts, smelts, and moves from Mine 'Medium' 1000000 meters to meet the mechanism that merges it with methane in a moving container only as wide as every other, under water, till it reaches the mouths of mothers a million miles away.

Additionally, the rise of the internet, social media, and algorithms that decide what media you consume makes abundantly clear that images are creating a world all their own. Google, an immortal legal entity has more 'rights' than anyone reading this. A corporation composed of people, but more aptly, in command of people. Automated traders on stock markets, artificially intelligent match makers, predictive software for education outcomes, insurance coverage, and prison liabilities; language operating in ways no human can conceptualize is maneuvering us. While this has long been true, it is increasingly so. Everything that is not 'nature' is 'design.' How much of what you think about, interact with, or strive for is design? Design is language and certainly language is designed, but more importantly, language designs itself. Did Newton invent Calculus, or did he discover it? Calculus discovered Newton.

We are born, we grow old, we die. For many months it is hot, then cold, then hot again. For many days it is bright, then night, then bright again. Clearly, it seems quite innocent that we would want to speak about something so elemental as time. Who knew that abstractions of the past, present, and future could be divided into fictions of labor so fanciful so as to feed populations of dancers in Denmark with the toil of turkey farmers from Turkmenistan.

## 5. Lingua Animalis

The idea that language controls our thoughts and actions, leaving us as simplistic meat puppets at the mercy of the mind control beast that is language may be disturbing. This is disturbing not least of all because of the conclusion it may lead us to, that certain languages are better than others. This idea, combined with a Darwinian understanding of language as an animal may appear to give credence to Social Darwinist thinking. If German were the most efficient language, clearly it would dominate the globe, and rightly so. The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, named for two of its proponents, is a theory of linguistic relativity that suggests that the structure of a language affects the world view or thoughts of its speakers. This would imply that people's perceptions are relative to their spoken language, be it Russian or Romanian. While the Social Darwinist implications lead many linguists to disregard and ridicule the hypothesis, subsequent research supports a nuanced view. Although the language that one speaks does not influence thought and perception in every possible way, there are many comparative studies that suggests multiple domains in which they do. The very structure of the language spoken informs perception (let alone the networks of associations embodied within the words that I allude to otherwise). This is true in gendered languages, where gendered words are not just grammatical occurrences. The gendered words influence the perception of an object or activity as masculine or feminine. Another domain is color. The range of the frequency of light that a color word encompasses defines how quickly a person is able to distinguish a color. For English speakers, consider pink. Pink is red but lighter, many languages do not label pink as a distinct color. The fact we have a distinct word for pink exaggerates in our minds the 'pinkness' of the hue the closer it approaches to red, leading us to identify subtle differences in that spectrum of light

much more quickly than a speaker of another language would. Different languages have different ways of counting, or measuring magnitude, rather than a system that counts individuals some languages have many different ways of saying ‘a lot,’ based on relative density and size of the objects they refer to. The different ways that language can lead us to think, and therefore act, are so various that it is difficult to express them in this language. Take, for example, the Tzeltal language a Mayan language spoken in Tenejapa, Mexico which expresses directional communication relative to a particular hill.<sup>12</sup> As opposed to English whereby there exists a left foot and a right foot, one’s foot is southwest the hill, or northeast. This kind of communication works from youth even when speakers are intentionally disoriented. It must require a mutual gyroscopic sense of location extremely alien to the egocentric nature of ‘left’ and ‘right.’

The fact that the language we speak in many ways delineates the bounds of our thoughts and actions does not translate to Social Darwinism. Social Darwinist thinking is a misunderstanding of the phenomenon of Natural Selection and Evolution that Darwin described. Social Darwinists, let’s take White Supremacists who believe the White race is destined for domination because of inherent superiority. This is idiotic. A certain self-centeredness appears in most social groups and languages, the name of many tribes translates to ‘the people.’ Innate greatness is proclaimed by an endless number of religions, races, languages, tribes, and nations, all claiming to be chosen people, the middle kingdom, or the center of the universe, this describes human psychology more than reality. In terms of Natural Selection, it describes a process not a prophecy, an endless churn rather than domination. One day Tyrannosaurus Rex can dominate the food chain and a few days later their progeny can be chickens and be much

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<sup>12</sup> Goldberg, Adele. "Whorfian Effects" PSY 309: Psychology of Language. Spring 2019, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ. Class Lecture.



lower along the food chain. Yet, in terms of genetic proliferation and quantity, chickens stuck in torturous factory farms are actually the more ‘successful’ species. There is no ‘greatness’ in reality, because ‘greatness’ is relative to a value judgment on what it is to be great. In Greek he is Alexander the Great, in Farsi he is Alexander the Cursed. In reality, there is competition for space, and an evolving set of conditions that optimize certain systems to occupy space. When these conditions change, uncompetitive systems will become the material basis upon which the following system arises.

I want to be careful to emphasize that all this generalized discussion of hegemonic languages is useful only insofar as these grand narratives are widely known and serve as good examples. I want to acknowledge the existence of smaller languages, resistance movements, and non-capitalist economies. These certainly exist, and proliferate in extreme diversity in different parts of the world. Professor Arturo Arias in his article “Indigenous Literatures? The Anthropocene? Theoretical Equivocations and Conceptual Tangles,” highlights many practices indigenous to Amerindian groups that operate distinctly from Western norms. He points out the myth that Europeans were the first to bring writing to the hemisphere, citing Olmec glyptic writing dating back to 2000 years before Christ (we measure time in Jesus).<sup>13</sup> Quipus are one of my personal favorites, ledgers that utilized a variety of strings of different colors with different knots tied at distinct heights to represent dates, accounts, and even stories. Spanish saw this competing form of representation and for a moment even adopted it. Later, however, they sought to destroy as many as they could; after all, knowledge is power.

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<sup>13</sup> Arias, Arturo. “Indigenous Literatures? The Anthropocene? Theoretical Equivocations and Conceptual Tangles.” pg. 111



Arias not only speaks to the many accomplishments to which indigenous societies had beaten their European counterparts, such as astrological calculations and agricultural techniques utilizing the indigenous ecosystem, but also references more recent successes brought about by continued resistance to settler colonial rule. These include Mapuches in Chile who resisted the privatization of their land by Pinochet for extractive industries. After decades, they have received cultural visibility through artwork and the government is looking to make constitutional amendments to guarantee their land rights and is considering a quota of seats in the constitutional assembly for indigenous people.<sup>14</sup> Another successful example of resistance Arias cites are the Zapatista uprisings, currently Zapatista lands are administered by *caracoles* (conch shells) “nonhierarchical councils exercising direct rule.”<sup>15</sup> Without any doubt, many languages, human coordination structures, sovereign currencies, and gift economies exist, customs from a precolonial world survive intact or have morphed into new ways of operating. In the nation-state dominated and denominated world, these are viewed as exceptions; they are not.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, pg. 112.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

While certain networks of languages can dominate other networks, leading to the virtual extinction of languages and their network of association, more often they are absorbed. Spanish and French appear different until an appreciation of Latin lets us view them as related. Latin and Sanskrit appear different until an appreciation of Proto-Indo-European lets us view them as related. Thor, Zeus, Dios, Greek Gods, Hindu Gods, Zoroastrians, and Muslims all contain Proto-Indo-European verbal associations. Catholic holidays are Roman holidays are Yoruba holidays. Although two linguistic movements or groups of people may appear opposed, odds are they are incarnations of each other and as battles ensue they will borrow from each other. This almost always applies to what I call language networks, rather than an identifiable individual language coding for specific grammatical rules and human practices. The hegemonic language complex swallows more than destroys. Language complexes that don't adapt to the new game in town taking up space get pummeled. Former belief structures may have worked fine for some time, responding, and adapting to surroundings. When conditions change, adapt and proliferate or do not, those appear to be the options. Humans, like all parasites, must be sure not to kill the host, lest be in for extinction themselves.

Language, I feel, deserves classification as an animal in and of itself. In fact, a form of intelligent life like carbon-based biological life more generally. We think ourselves capable of self-perception...what do you think math is, it is grammar figuring itself out! Marks mimicking the universe, language bumping around our neurons into nothingness!

For some frame of reference, I keep talking about language as an animal, so we must understand what about animals provokes this comparison. A biological lifeform on planet Earth procreates and proliferates by being able to constantly evolve to a changing environment. They evolve in part because every attribute of these lifeforms are encoded in their DNA. Mutations in

DNA are a part of the design, such that over time new attributes that help a species proliferate succeed and those that hurt the species don't succeed. In biological life there are the bones, teeth, gonads, and sensory systems coming up against harsh weather and hardened predatory competition. Beneath the surface, however, individual genes are striving to proliferate. [The term 'striving,' anthropomorphizes the issue. I have frequently used the words 'trying' or 'whose purpose is to' (any kind of verb that indicates purposeful action), these are just useful words, in reality there is no emotive charge or goal here, matter is just enveloped in these patterns that we can identify. Fundamentally the only matter that can take up space is matter engaged in a process that proliferates, but on the scale of matter, one carbon particle can be the fear in a bunny one minute, and the excitement of a hunter the next, engaged in an atmospheric cycle one minute and a reproductive one the next.] Matter is the building blocks of information, DNA encodes for biological life, but bear in mind that DNA is not the only organizing principle on the scene.

I believe language exists on par with DNA as an organizing principle. There is evidence in our morphology that we have actually given up other things in order to maintain our speech, for example, the relative position of our voicebox makes it slightly more likely that we choke on our food than other primates, but the benefits have outweighed the costs. There are plenty of DNA-encoded necessities to the existence of language, like how big our brains are and our ability to stand upright. How can I associate all genetic life, across species, as a singular entity and simultaneously say that some human quirk (language) stands outside of this organization? We are not yet at a juncture where language could survive beyond the genetic infrastructure it sits atop, however, we already have words to describe the phenomenon and language similarly has shown what can only be called a will to proliferate. I am not here to speculate about the nature of the singularity, a moment when design will proliferate without a need for biology. In

the present, language has proven itself similar to biological life. Both have mechanism to encourage diversity, to explore multiple niches and hedge risk. Both build upon previous iterations: just like how having two arms and legs resulted from previously walking on four legs, Spanish evolved out of Latin. The evolution of DNA and the evolution of language occur because of available niches to exploit. The nature of these niches can overlap of course. Consider a language that incentivizes exploration, Polynesians have populated far flung islands across vast oceans; this clearly has biological benefits empowered by linguistic feats. Language and genetics are very intertwined. Consider the Royal Family of England, a set of genetics whose proliferation is all but guaranteed because of the correlation in language it has been able to achieve. White Supremacists aim for a similar fate, however, clearly the term 'White' is not as loyal to a certain set of adenines, cytosines, and guanines. Language has unique niches, however, that make it very dissimilar to genetics. Consider the battle between Coca-Cola and Pepsi, I'm sure they taste differently, but advertising campaigns generally are the determinant between the choice of one or another. This kind of fight for space is very different than the fight between two bird species with different beak sizes. In that example, the genetics of each bird is fighting for dominance on the battlefield of the birds territory, 'who can absorb the most energy to produce the most offspring?' is essentially the battle. The battle between Coke and Pepsi, is fought in a much wider array of arenas. Because linguistic innovations can spread so rapidly, they are interlinked within a huge language network where the battlefield is atomized. The battle between Coke and Pepsi is *simultaneously* in the advertising boardrooms' minds in Midtown Manhattan, the battle is between radio and television proliferation, the battle is within the neurons of Filipino housewives, the battle is for display on refrigerators in a Brazilian bar. The different attributes of language or DNA explain the difference between the niches that language or DNA seeks to

exploit. Language appears to have a few distinct features, it can rapidly evolve in ways DNA cannot. It can ‘describe’ and therefore latch onto trends of matter and physics beyond the scope of the genetic process, it can speculate into the future using an ever-growing past (in contrast to the past that DNA references which exists in the eternal present), and it can organize both biomass and inert matter.

DNA’s evolution is expressed through biomass, design’s evolution similarly reorganizes matter, it takes up space. Language is a physical phenomenon, just like rain, lightning, and natural selection. The scope of language increasingly grows to create new physical phenomena in addition to floating atop existing processes. Radio frequencies of all kinds have always existed, but this plane of existence is now dominated increasingly by linguistic phenomena. Tongues have long helped mammals sense their surroundings, but in humans tongue muscle fibers have taken on supreme importance not only in tasting food but in coaxing food into its mouth. All planes of existence have either been found or are waiting to be found by a linguistic phenomenon that knows no bounds.

To conclude this chapter here are some charts from a book on sociolinguistics:

*Globalization and Language in the Spanish-Speaking World: Macro and Micro Perspectives.*

**Table 6.3** Linguistic factors and /r/ assibilation

Position	Assibilated		Non-assibilated	
	N	%	N	%
Initial	94	30%	217	70%
Internal	67	29%	165	71%

**Table 6.2** The use of the palatal lateral vs the non-palatal lateral by first-generation Andean migrants

Informant	lateral /l/		No lateral /y/	
	N	%	N	%
3AG	53	50	53	50
4GT	6	12	44	88
9FA	0	0	20	100
10JG	0	0	20	100
11BI	6	20	24	80
12BM	28	47	32	53

Table 6.1 Characteristics of speakers

Speaker	Generation in Lima	Family background	Neighbourhood	Sex	1st lng	Education	Occupation
3AG	1	Andean	Shantytown	M	Quechua	Some primary	Retired
4GT	1	Andean	Shantytown	M	Quechua	Primary	Retired market vendor
8FT	2	Andean	Shantytown	M	Spanish	Secondary	Military
9FA	1	Andean	Shantytown	F	Quechua	Some primary	Unemployed
10JG	1	Andean	Shantytown	M	Quechua	Some primary	Building caretaker
11BI	1	Andean	Shantytown	F	Quechua	Primary	Unemployed
12BM	1	Andean	Shantytown	M	Quechua	Some primary	Unemployed
13CC	2	Andean	Shantytown	F	Spanish	Some secondary	Unemployed
14EF	2	Andean	Shantytown	M	Spanish	Some secondary	Unemployed
15JF	2	Andean	Shantytown	F	Spanish	Secondary	Unemployed
16LS	2	Andean	Shantytown	F	Spanish	Some college	Factory worker
17MC	Non-migrant	Non-Andean	Established Neighbourhood	F	Spanish	Some college	Nurses' assistant
18JN	Non-migrant	Non-Andean	Established neighbourhood	F	Spanish	Secondary	Unemployed
19JE	Non-migrant	Non-Andean	Established neighbourhood	M	Spanish	Secondary	Unemployed
20JT	Non-migrant	Non-Andean	Established neighbourhood	M	Spanish	Secondary	Security guard

Table 6.4 Social factors and assimilation of /r/

Factor groups	Factors	Occurrence	%	Weight
Generation of migration	Andean migrants	156/ 325	48	0.744
	Children of migrants	4/ 128	3	0.267
	limeños	1/ 90	1	0.082
Occupation	Unemployed	160/ 433	36	0.672
	Semi-skilled work	1/110	1	0.056
Sex	Male	154/ 344	44	0.723
	Female	7/ 199	3	0.160

Table 6.9 Archmorpheme *lo*

Speaker	No. of cases of <i>lo</i> for plural	%	No. of cases of <i>lo(s)</i> for feminine	%
<b>Migrants</b>				
3AG	1/3	33	6/7	86
4GT	2/2	100	5/5	100
9FA	3/6	50	5/5	100
10JG	6/7	86	4/6	67
11BI	5/8	62	5/6	83
12BM	1/2	50	6/12	50
Total	18/28	64	31/41	76
<b>Children of migrants</b>				
8FT	9/17	53	0/3	0
13CC	1/4	25	3/14	21
14EF	3/4	75	2/4	50
15JF	0/0	-	5/24	21
16LS	3/3	100	1/8	12
Total	16/28	57	11/53	21
<b>Limeños</b>				
17MC	2/9	22	0/26	0
18JN	1/3	33	0/8	0
19JE	1/2	50	1/6	17
20JT	0/4	0	0/23	0
Total	4/18	22	1/63	2

Table 6.5 /s/ elision according to position and number of syllables

Int. factors	Occurrences	%	Weight
Final	774/1027	75	0.601
Interior	87/208	42	0.116
Monosyllabic	237/394	60	0.255
Polysyllabic	624/840	74	0.623

Table 7.3 Use of the infinitive, the third person of the verb and the gerund, according to ethnic group

Ethnic group	Infinitive %	3rd person of the verb %	Gerund %	Total %
Haitians	21 (20%)	59 (55%)	27 (25%)	107 (100%)
%	84%	36%	71%	49%
Dominican-Haitians	3 (7%)	31 (76%)	6 (15%)	40 (100%)
%	12%	19%	16%	18%
Arayanos	1 (.01%)	67 (95%)	2 (.02%)	70 (100%)
%	4%	41%	5%	32%
Total	25 (12%)	157 (72%)	35 (17%)	217
%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Dominicans	-	7	3	10
%	-	4%	8%	4%

Table 8.1 Demography of Nicaragua's Caribbean Coast Region

Ethnic group	Population	% CC total%	nat. total	Language	Origin
Mestizo	117,143	46.11	95.6	Spanish	Country's inland
Miskitu	70,122	27.5	1.7	Miskitu	Indigenous mixed Amerindian/African/European Afro-Caribbean
Creole	50,000	19.6	1.3	Mosquito Coast Creole	
Sumu/Mayangna	13,204	5.19	0.8	Sumu	Indigenous Amerindian
Ulwa (Sumu sub-group)	600	1.0	>0.5	Miskitu	Indigenous Amerindian
Garifuna	3,068	1.2	0.07	English	Amerindian/Afro-Caribbean
Rama	1,023	0.4	0.02	Creole Rama Coast Creole	(St Vincent) Amerindian, possibly from South America
Total	254,560	100	100	(3.89% non-Mestizo)	

Source: Adapted from Holm (1978) and González Pérez (1997: 32-41).

Table 7.4 Non-standard uses, according to verb type

Verb class	Infinitive	-Person*	Gerund	-TMA**	Other	Total
Stative	3 (3%)	77	4 (4%)	15	4 (4%)	103
1158	12%	(75%)	10%	(15%)	50%	100%
50.1%		49%		45%		40%
Dynamic	22 (14%)	79	34 (22%)	18	3 (2%)	155
1152	88%	(51%)	(90%)	(12%)	50%	100%
49.9%		51%		55%		60%

Look at that beautiful language, languaging languages to language language! Does it appear that I've spoken around in circles, pointing at everything without everything coming to a point? Dear reader, I hope the domain of language in your eyes has widened at least slightly, and you catch a glimpse of the beast I mirror. Langue and Parole may have been helpful terms for Saussure but we can see beyond grammatical structures and vernacular cultures. We can see beyond phonemes, morphemes, calques, and rhotic regurgitations. We can see beyond telecommunications, can we see beyond religions, see can we beyond libraries, academies, and courts. We can see beyond dreams, we can see beyond abandoned hieroglyphs, and animals who know their names. When taken together the mass of this interconnected network is awe-inspiring. What does it trod upon, what are its obstacles, what are its goals, and where do we fit?

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## 6. Auto Bio Graffiti

I remember being in a Spanish class at this University and telling the class that I felt that no matter what I said or how I sounded, that I spoke Spanish and no one could tell me otherwise. Even if the grammar was ‘wrong’ or the genders were ‘wrong’ or the pronunciation was ‘wrong’ or the word choice ‘wrong.’ I felt that by the very nature of me being raised by a mother from Puerto Rico and a father from the Dominican Republic, I spoke Spanish. If I spoke Spanglish, or Portuñol, or whatever label you like, I felt like one way or another the Spanish had stuffed their words down my throat. Any attempt to criticize me for how they came out was short-sighted or elitist. The class laughed of course. There exists a Standard Spanish, but similar to how African American Vernacular English is a language that is not Standard English, what does ‘Standard’ really mean? This tendency of mine to doubt dominant narratives is rooted in my lived experience, as a true a source as any.

Growing up in a Spanish speaking household in an English-speaking society meant that my identity was a little confusing. I remember telling my parents once that I was English not Spanish. “You’re Spanish! I’m English!” I defiantly proclaimed. It turns out I was wrong on both counts, or was I? You are \_\_\_\_\_ is typically filled in with Nation State of birth. Unless it’s not. My father was Dominican, that was clear. My mother was Puerto Rican and spoke about Americans as though she were not one, but she was, or was she? Growing up in a very diverse immigrant neighborhood we would talk about Indians, or Blacks, or Arabs, or Egyptians, or Filipinos, many who were born here but were not Americans, those were always White. It was interesting to read *Racism on Trial*’s account regarding the Chicanos and hearing about the birth of stereotypes on the other side of the continent that contributed to my understanding of myself.

Throughout my youth, in jest more than malice, I've been called a 'dirty Mexican.' I'm not from Mexico, no one in my family is, but I was seen by many of my peers as Mexican and liable to be dirty. I came to understand from a very early age the not-so-subtle alliances of linguistic worlds, Anglophone, Francophone, Hispanophone, Arabophone, or Sinophone worlds that determine action much more predictably than the more acceptable (and historically flexible) discussion of Nation State boundaries.

I grew up on Columbus Drive. I remember wishing I was Columbus, sad that everything had been discovered. My first job was as a soccer referee. I got paid green papers, I was very excited. Little kids played the game and I, a slightly bigger kid, would blow a whistle and tell them the rules when they broke them or when the ball crossed the wrong lines. Soccer is a game, that like many sports simulates war, with a winner and loser, a heaven and hell, an ally and an enemy, a black team and white team. I know this because parents would yell at me, having been alive at this point for only ten years, for calling a foul on their six year old, how nuts. I remember playing soccer as a child and being embarrassed I was not all that great because Latinos were good at soccer I was told. Dominicans were good at baseball, my cousin sure was, but my father took me out of that because I wasn't so great. My friends, however, celebrated my Blackness when it turned out I was good at track and field, I also really enjoyed watermelon.

In the United States, the concept of race is a dominant hierarchical mechanism, within which I had to understand myself. Race in Latin American society is not equivalent to race in the US. In Latin America, my parents were White. My father told the story of my great grandfather who married a Black woman and was disowned by his family. This is true, while on the sliding scale of Dominican colorism my family was certainly White. In the United States, by the one drop rule, however, my father and I are Black. I was forced to grapple with whether my self-

presentation could be a betrayal to ancestors of mine who were African slaves? This rule has fallen out of explicit use only recently. In high school I took keen interest when learning about Adam Clayton Powell Jr., one of the most important Black figures in American history, and the whitest Black man you'll ever meet. The nature of race is complex. I remember my first girlfriend was Black and my grandmother on my father's side, a Black woman, grimaced. My grandfather on my mother's side, a Puerto Rican who grew up in the Depression, recounted to me decisions he made when living in New York City for a short stint as a child. In the public school he attended the Italians fought the Blacks. When he told some boys he was Puerto Rican, of which New York had a significant population, he was called a Spic and worried about his safety. With his last name *Corcelles* and his light complexion, he told everyone at school that he was French, they called him Frenchy, and never bothered him. As I grew older, and academic achievement propelled me to high quality schooling, I learned the language of power. This language of power was a language of wealth and White culture, of suits and ties, minded manners, particular use of forks and knives. The extremes of the situations I witnessed elucidated a dizzying disparity of human conditions, I wondered how it was possible. I transited between that White wealthy world, my immigrant neighborhood, my families' homes back on the islands, and the city where my Social Worker mother helps recent immigrants who are living with three families in two rooms. Whereas some people that my mother worked with spoke Nahuatl, my classmates at an elite boarding school spoke Standard English.

I saw how others perceived me would change by how I dressed, whether my hair was long and curly or short and straight, by my diction, my accent, by who I was with. Being racially ambiguous, I could be White, Latino, Mixed Black, Arab, or Jewish by simply saying as much. My schooling afforded me traveling opportunities where I could be a Brazilian in Cuba, I could

be Canadian in Mexico, I could be Dominican in Italy, and my charades made people behave in many different ways towards me. I noticed how my sister, whose name Natasha is less evocative of a Latino heritage than Alejandro certainly influenced how she was perceived by others and thus how she perceived herself. My friends in my immigrant neighborhood would speak to me in English and speak to their parents in English with the accent of their parents. Code-switching meant something they could not describe. All the world is a stage and as my peers constructed their identities to place themselves within one narrative or another, my ability to hop around these narratives made it apparent to me that they were not real in any sense other than as much as we believed them. No matter how inherent they appeared like accent, gender, or race, these were mechanisms to signal one's relationship to the social body. Some signals were immutable, yes, but only gained coherence and significance within an ever-changing matrix of imagined, interrelated constructs.

Growing up in a Catholic household and attending parochial school in primary school presented me with a coherent epistemology, a worldview, a blueprint for reality. At one point I thought knowledge in the halls of the academies more holy than those in the temple. I encountered professor after professor with not a clue of the world they lived in, not an ounce of self-awareness of the pain that lent them power. I realized the knowledge they purport to have is a tradition of belief more similar to Catholicism than they were keen to admit. Time continued to tick. Maturation is full of choices by which one must reference their worldview. What is the right thing for me to do? How should I live my life? I took these questions very seriously and it led me to question the basis for the word *should*. Many of my friends in high school and college, at very 'high quality' institutions wanted to work in finance. I found it absurd that my rich friends wanted to get richer by moving the money of rich people around. Later I learned that money

itself, along with many other things, were absurd. My sister became a nun, because giving up one's autonomy is the holy thing to do if you love Jesus. Following a moment when I perceived how every facet of my being from my anatomy to my thoughts were a reflection of the relative and arbitrary dance of matter and energy. I felt myself as the meat puppet playing at narratives I could never escape. I converted from pursuing a legal career in civil rights to dancing and drooling, defining my world view for others. Because words would not cut it, I traversed through poetry, dance, performance, song, and have largely embraced painting to symbolically communicate what I believe is true.

Here are a few relevant pieces, mostly paint on canvas or collage, to sum up our discussion on the nature of language.



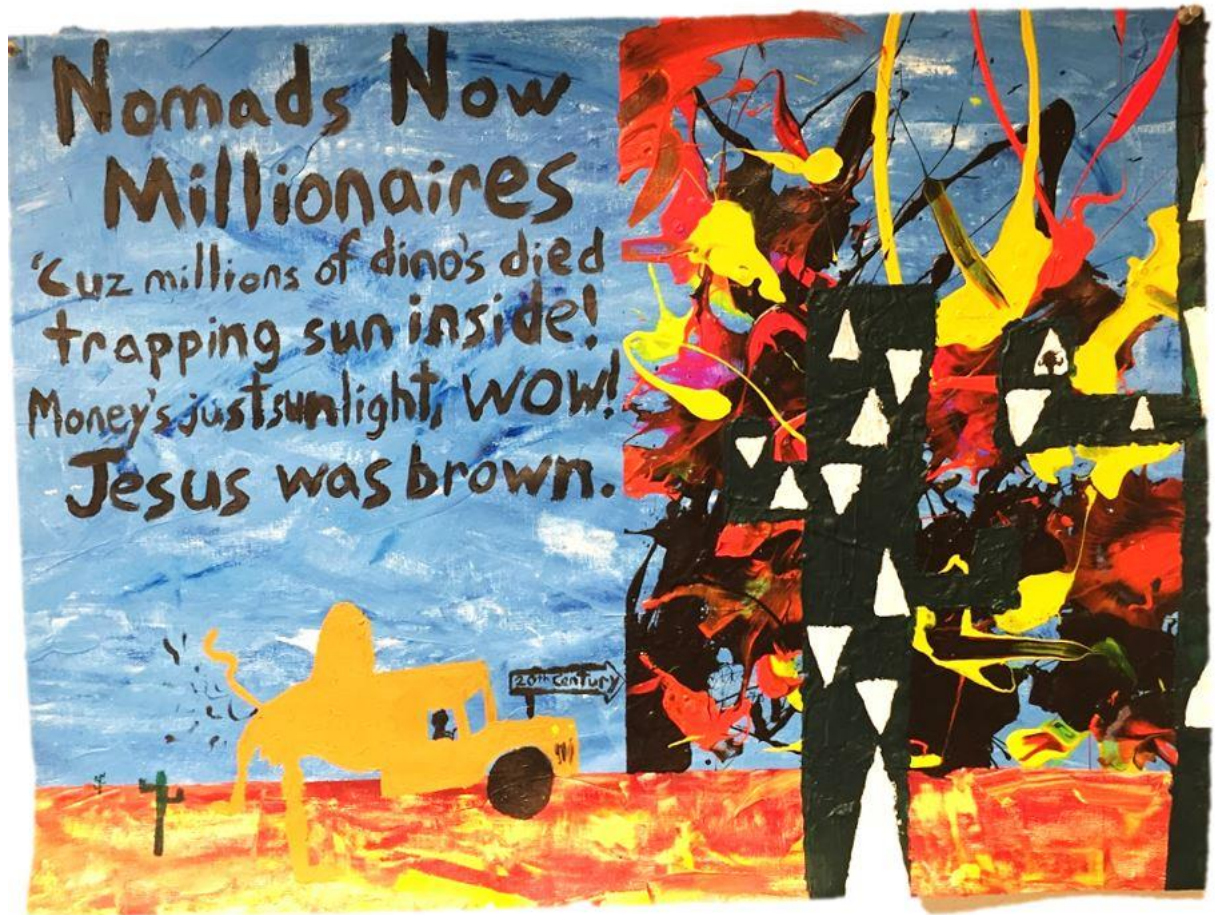
*Lyin'* This piece contemplates the majesty of the Line. A single Line can be an I, a 1, a piece of morse code. Every single written word or visual image is made up of lines. From a single visual contrast we are able to encode infinite complex relationships. The words on the left and right read 'Lane' and 'Loin' two lines that are found in the real world. The words 'Lane' and 'Loin' are representations of objects in the real world, the representations can read aloud and converted into sounds, the sounds can be very different. The words 'Lane' and 'Loin' spoken in an American accent mimic the pronunciation of the word 'Line' in an accent from the Great British Isles. The title *Lyin'*, another rhyme of 'Line,' attempts to insinuate the deceptive nature of the seemingly straight line from language production to perception.



From left to right *Subliminal*, *Wired*, & *Hear Beats*

These three paintings were not originally a triptych but in the context of this essay I see them as related. They seek to emphasize some of the constraints that language has regarding the human form. Although from a more typical point of view where language serves human interests, this may seem unnecessary to reference. The argument I've made in these essays, however, is that language contorts humans in whatever way language sees fit be it in corsets, chains, or chariots. Although the human form is very flexible, language is clearly an adaptive phenomenon born out of biological interests and therefore the propagation of the human genes is the base upon which language operates. Another baseline that existed prior to language and allows this emergent phenomenon are the sensory organs that humans have and much of chemistry that defines how our neural circuitry learns and makes decisions. These images highlight the libidinal impulse that all action emerges from and the translation of energetic stimuli from without into electric signals within, processed to promote survival (continued heart beats).





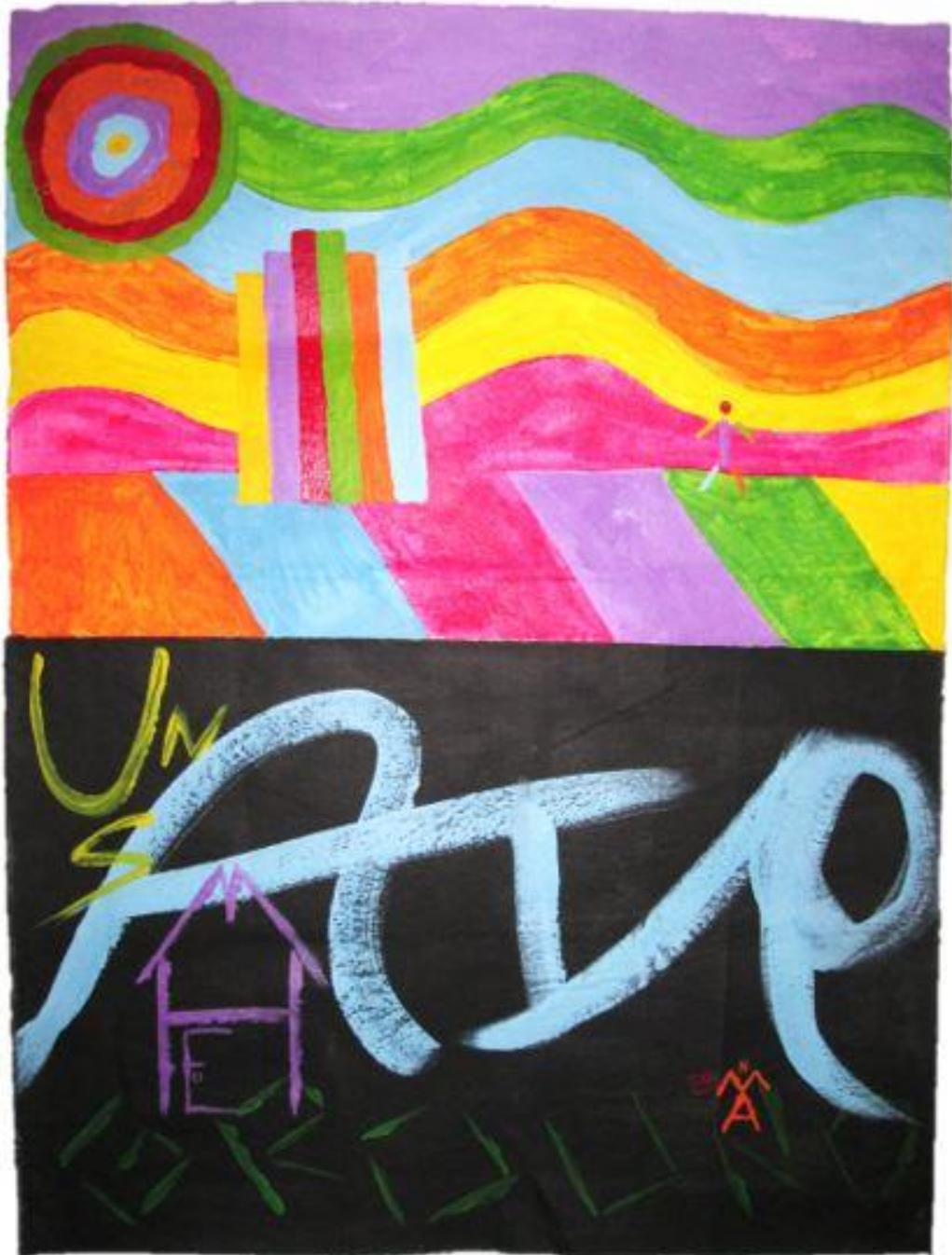
**Center Right** This painting shows a desert scene, with a half camel, half jeep creature heading towards the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, when cacti turns to skyscrapers. This piece is meant to explain economics. People will talk till they are blue in the face about how capital allows a greed incentive to create supply chains, fill niches of demand with supply, and incentivize behavior towards growth. Other people think capitalism sucks.

To connect these social analyses with the larger picture I'm painting, imagine this.  
*Nomads Now Millionaires 'cuz millions of dino's died trapping sun inside! Money's just sunlight, wow! Jesus was brown.*



*Center Right* is about the Middle East, parts of the region were sparsely inhabited with roaming nomads for thousands of years. Imagine the wealth of Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Bahrain, the Saudi Arabian kingdom, these places now are flush with money because of their region's fossil fuel reserves. Fossil fuel is valuable because it is millions of years of compressed sunlight energy in an easily harnessed form. Sunlight is valuable. Currency is how we as a society distribute the benefits of the cumulative amount of sunlight humankind has access to. This sunlight can be in the form of oil, labor, knowledge, manufactured goods, all of these things are energy or require energy. Currency summoned a swarm of human energy to make the Middle East more hospitable to human life.

I mention Jesus as brown because he was brown but also because the cosmology that is Christianity often likes to pretend he was White, similar to how the cosmology around currency likes to pretend it required hard work rather than it was handed work.

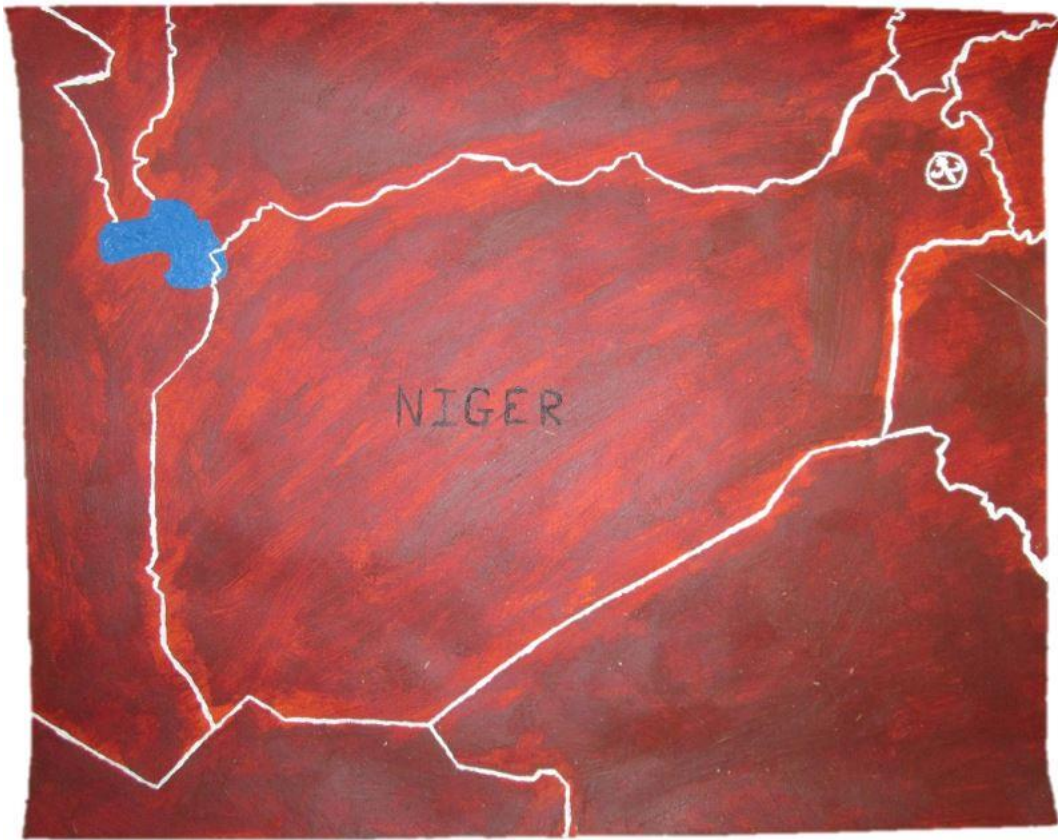


*Little Red Book* This painting is meant to illustrate the influence of language on our perception. The bottom section in black is the perception of a literate person. Language can be very useful in giving structure to our perceptions, sharing connections about things in the world, coordinating with others, and allowing for an exploration of things concrete and abstract that escape the grasp

of our senses. At the same time, language often limits our understanding of the world around us. The bottom section illustrates our perception of how language maps onto the world. 'Sun' exists as a singular, isolated entity, situated above the rest of the scene. The 'air' weaves around the building that building that is 'Home,' all these objects are singular entities as dictated by language taught to us in the little red book. The little red book is what some called the 'Quotations from Mao-Tse-Tung,' a propaganda tool of the Chinese dictator in dictating the terms of reality. If you look closely at the little red book in the bottom scene it reads "O Ok," indicating our acceptance of words as accurate reflections of the world. The whole bottom scene exists in a black void, where objects happen to be pasted on. The top portion of the paintings represents reality as it is, as it can be perceived when we attempt to transcend the boundaries of language. The colors previously relegated to each individual object, indicative of a distinction, now are everywhere. Matter in the sky can cycle into matter in the ground, just as energy in the sun can cycle in to energy in the person. Each of this distinct linguistic units are actually connected singular things. Only by transcending language, exchanging the bottom perception for the top can we see the Sun in the Ground and the Air in the Man.



*Object* This piece illustrates well a concept I believe may be difficult. Over the course of this essay I've discussed the physical nature of language. It is difficult for many to believe this because they consider language to be the domain of essays, reports, articles, songs, speeches, or slang. Those examples have grammar and can be typed on a typewriter, they are clearly outcroppings of language. This painting shows a chair is language because there is a proper way to use it. A chair is telling you to sit your ass on it, with your feet on the floor, and your head towards the sky. One may feel that a chair is inert, it is not speaking to you, but it is. It was designed with a specific purpose in mind, the association your brain make when it observes said object calls to mind 'c h a i r.' To object to this object is to disagree with it, as the red figure does.



*The Political Map of Niger* For an American audience, this image might feel derogatory, offensive. But the fact remains this is just the political map of Niger. The white lines of the political borders were drawn by European colonialists, disregarding tribal realities, language groups, over even natural borders like bodies of water. This piece is about colonialism, but more importantly this piece is about representation. Representation understood as language, symbols, maps, borders, which are purportedly abstractions of reality but truly reflections of power. The Political Map of Niger is just that, political, who respects the myth of the 'nation' of Niger depends on one's own interests and place within various in-groups or out-groups. Very easily someone would have this image on a globe in their home, but would call me a bigot for painting it on a canvas, because of how history has trained their brain to react to different lines in the sand.



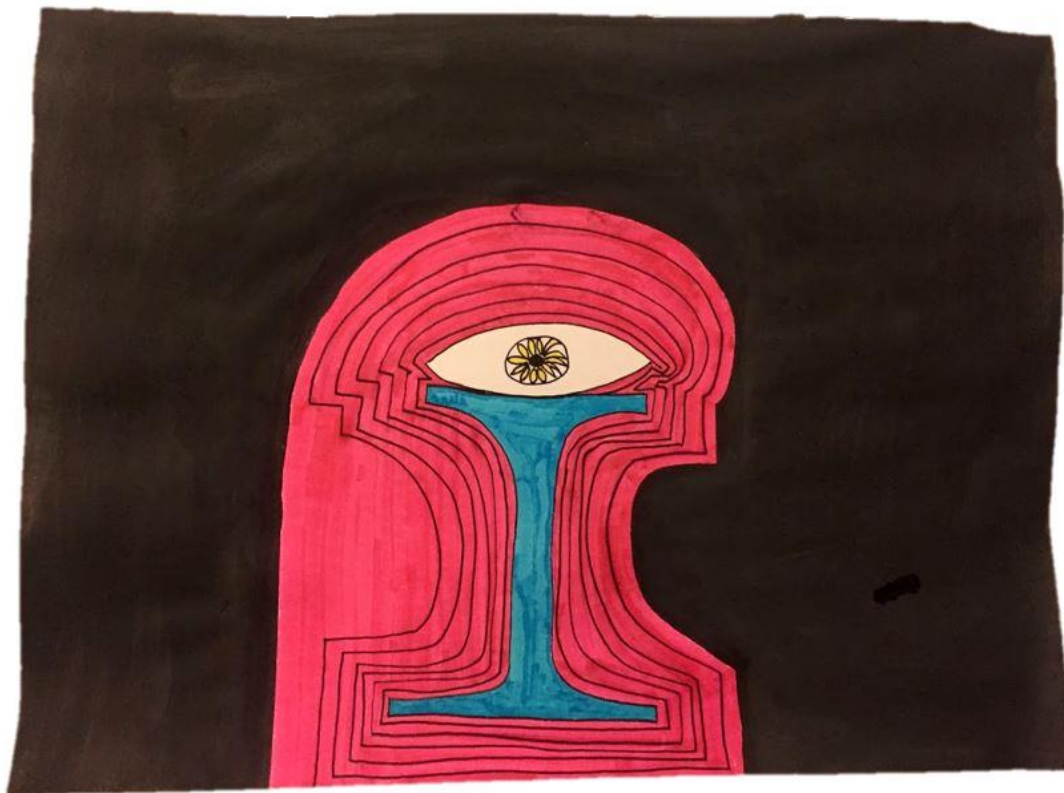


*Mapmatics* Like the previous piece this painting utilizes geometric abstraction to highlight the deceptive nature of maps. Why are maps generally composed in a North as Up (Heaven) and South as Down (Hell) orientation? Why is the Mercator projection most wide spread, making Northern Europe disproportionately gigantic? Why is the Atlantic World at the center, despite human history indicating a march out of Africa towards South America along the Pacific? Maps, as representations of the human history of human geography are as objective as any cave painting. I use the colors to talk about race, a clearly silly invention many swear by as descriptive, or worse, defining.



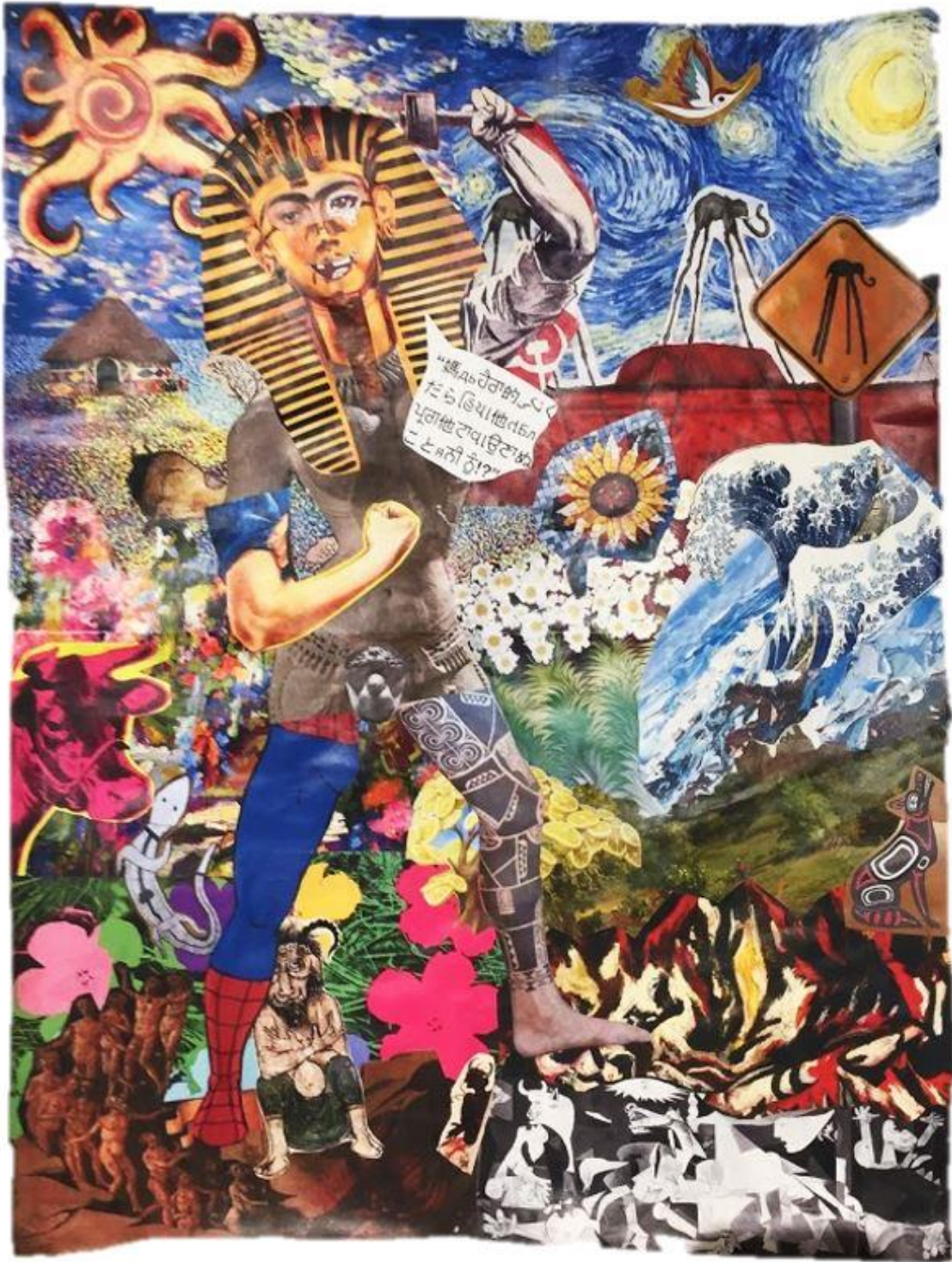
*aemn?* This painting is made in the shape of a figure, highlighting the fact the words are just lines. This combination of letters can create many different words. *Name* – a word that is me, but also tells of my culture. *Amen* – a word that professes belief in a cosmology. *A Men* – An individual society. *E Man* – Like ‘e-mail,’ an individual within a web, the ‘e’ forms the head, because language and perception are in that tiny head. *Mean* – both as average because no one person is special, we are all average. Also, mean because we can be pretty mean. *Mane* – in

contrast to average, we adorn ourselves like we are the main event, like a lion's mane. *Nema* – like *nemeSIS* or... *Mena* – like *menoPAUSE*, talk about patriarchy embedded in language! Jokes aside, language and our reactions to it truly are like inkblot tests, just networks of associations, free association has a way of revealing the subconscious which is the true actor. What is the aemn?



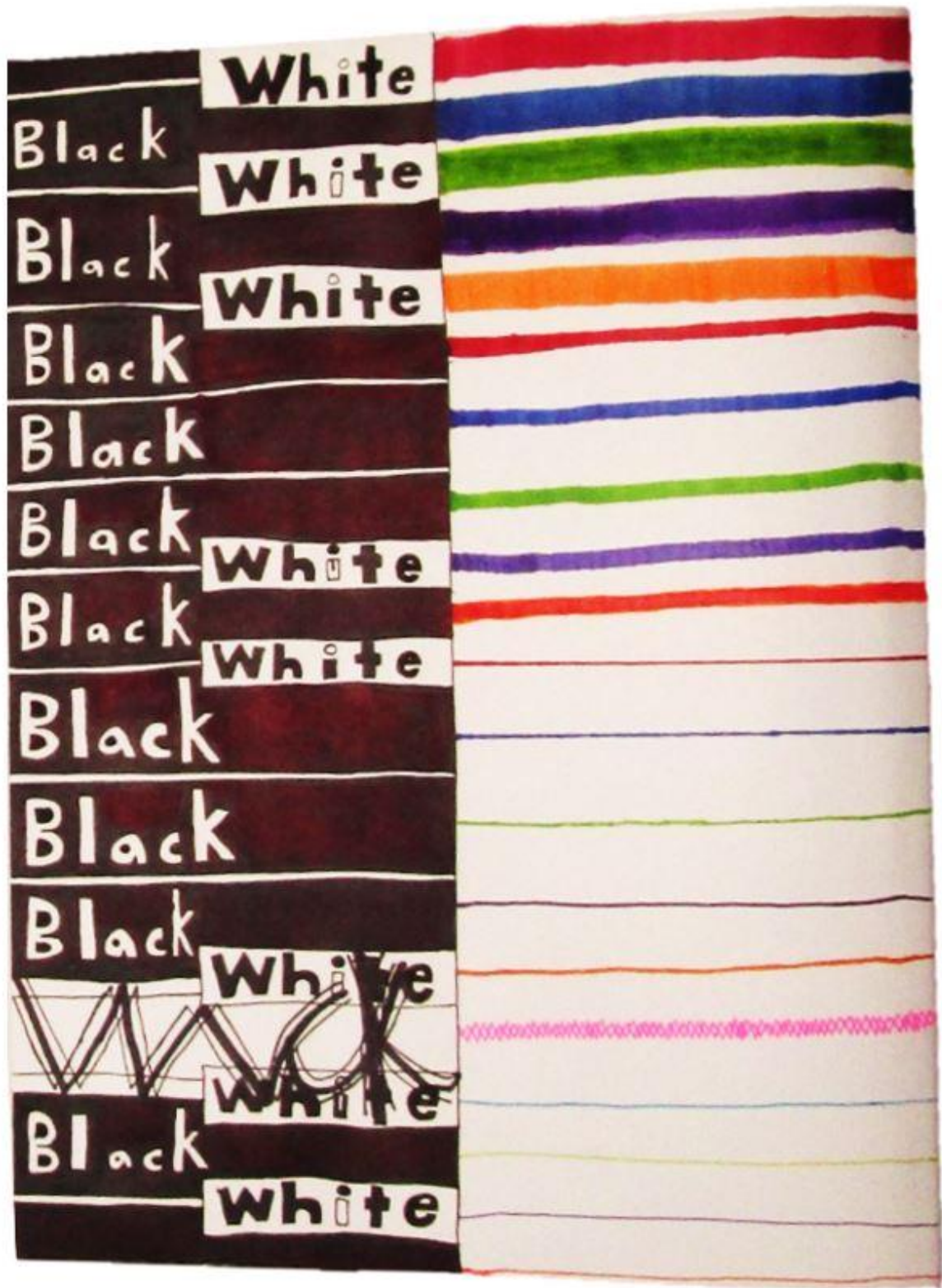
*I* The self, is one's perceptions. The existence of the self is a function of language. Human beings certainly act as collectives and individuals, how much one perceives oneself to act more as a collective or as an individual is a result of language.





*Aesthetic Prosthetic* Throughout human history, one thing has remained true, our propensity to adorn, be it our bodies, our walls, our sounds. Every society, every time, comes with its own aesthetics. These aesthetics affect the future, in a wide array of references, etymologies, histories we will never know.





*Loony Tunes*



/(\*)(\*)\



*Memories in Membrane*

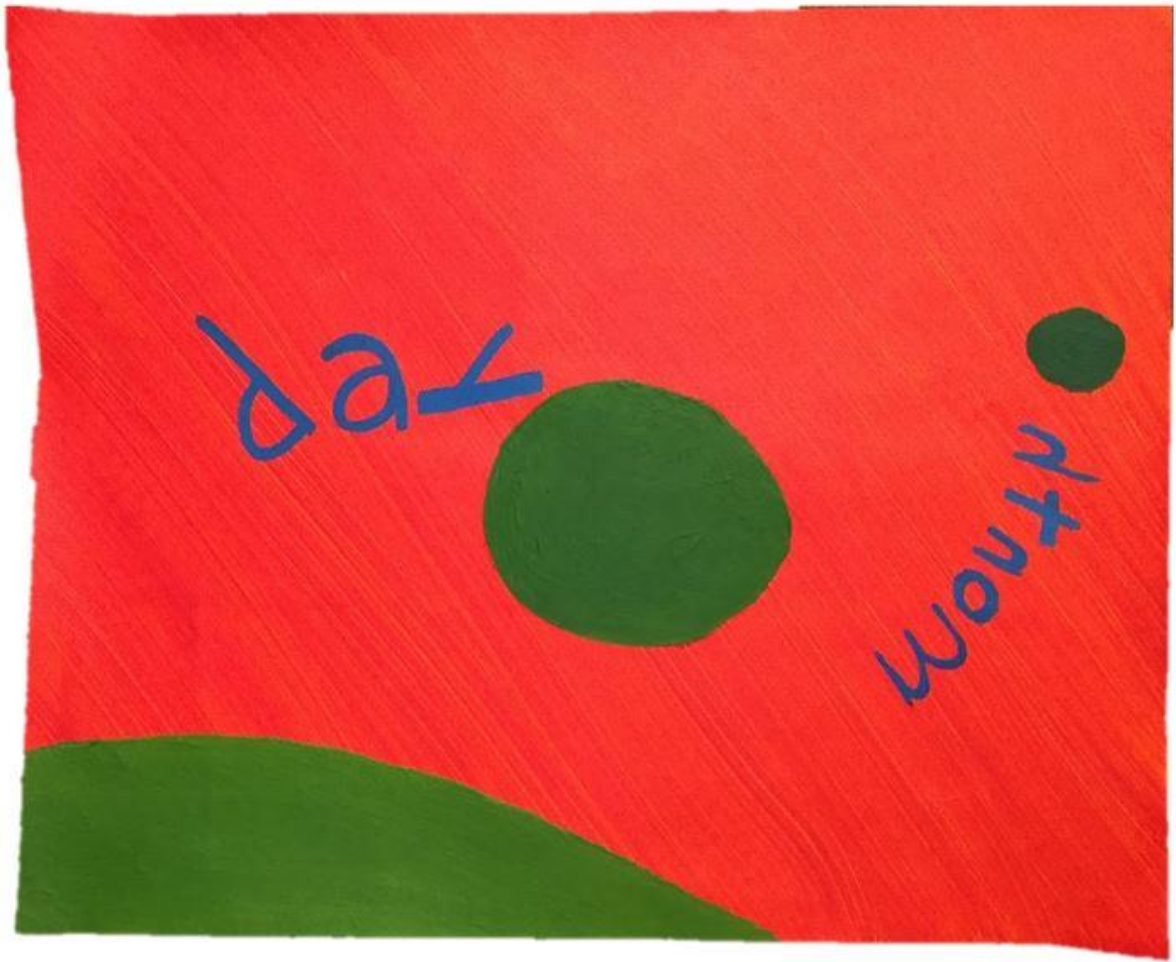




*Take a Knee*



*Worthless Words*



*Yer Spheres*





*Shapes That Make No Sense Make Scents*



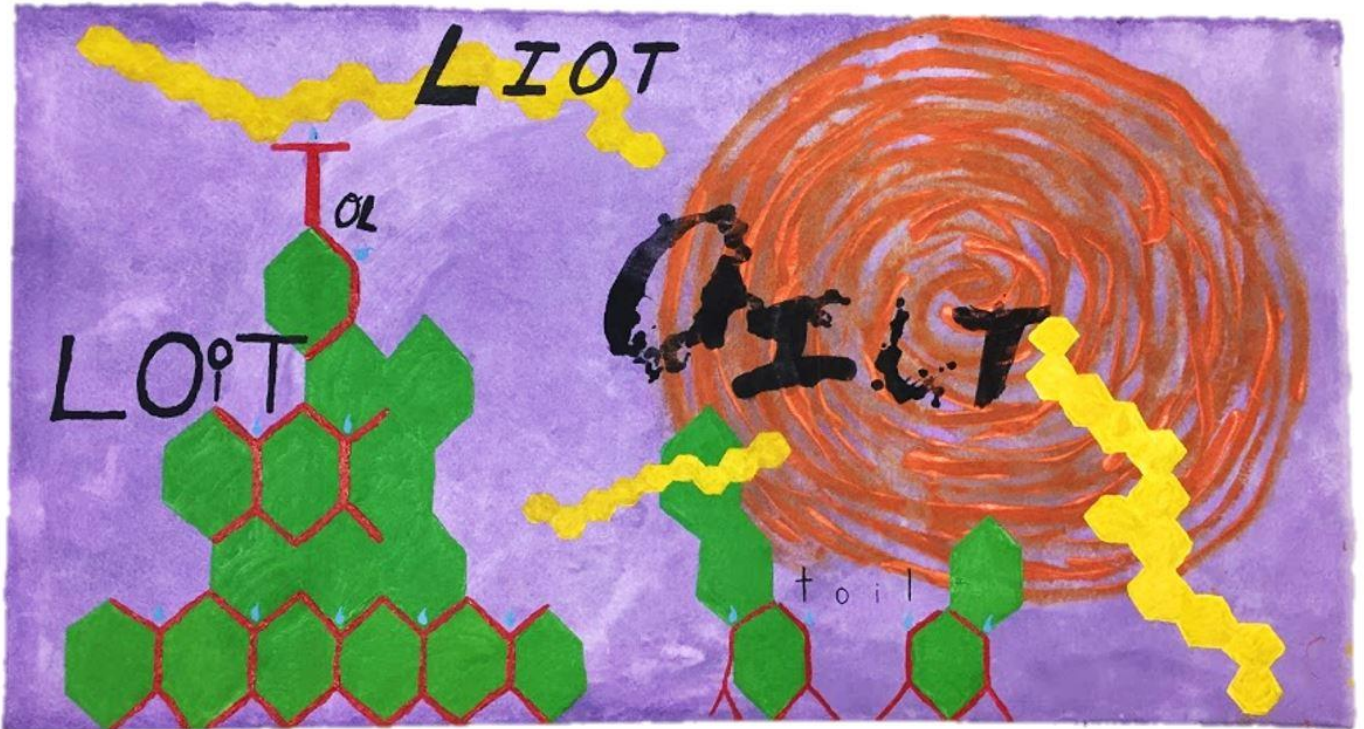


*Labor Day Sails As Columbus Dreams*



*Colored Folk*





### *Our Language is Time*

This painting attempts to describe the ways in which entropy creates the organization that is our society. There are five word-like associative clusters I attempted to weave in to make sense of the image. On the far left there is “Loot / Loiter/ it low/ tool” to describe the masses of accumulated goods and capital. Capital accumulates according to an organizing logic, defined by the following segment. “I/ it / Old / Idle/ Idol,” a deity or a monarch sits atop the structure, it is the *raison d’etre* for what occurs below. “Light / Riot” the energy from the sun animates matter on Earth. “Oil / Oiled / Wilt” Entropic radiation reliably sourced from the sun. “Toil / toilet / tool” labor in the muscle fibers of the masses. Language associations facilitate the process, but it also is related to larger forces of the cosmos be it the distant sun or the simple geometric fact that no shape contains matter within stronger walls than a hexagon.



*The Wolf Inside Your Chihuahua* The Wolf is an apex predator. Top of the food chain. Scary. If you were to run into a wolf you would be unable to run away from said wolf, it would eat you. Vicious, able, hardy hunters.

Let us consider running into a chihuahua. You might not even notice you had stepped on it & crushed its skull. Chihuahuas fit in purses & can die if yelled at too loudly. Effectively the Chihuahua is a parasite, feeding off of humans offering nothing in return but its yappy company. There are more Chihuahuas than wolves on the planet, so in this way you could say they've won.

Tiny, defenseless parasites are the descendants of large, able predators. It took only a few thousand years, a wink in evolutionary time. The body structure, habits, diet, and social life of

the two animals are so different, and yet, much remains. The Chihuahua's asymmetrically fierce demeanor seems to be a remnant, or an acknowledgment at the very least of a past it must compensate for. Indeed, if a wolf got a Chihuahua pregnant the mother would explode. We, like wolves & Chihuahuas are beings whose biology, our very being, can shift dramatically as we respond to the pressures in a fluid environment.

The constantly shifting nature of physical phenomena in response to new pressures, resulting in the filling of available niches for propagation, is seen in biological information like genetics in similar to ways to 'language,' understood as a diverse layer of physical phenomena from communication satellites to Egyptian pyramids. This layer of physical phenomena I call language, embodied in matter from subways to governments, responds to different pressures than a biological species might and occupies niches in different ways. Similarly, however, it builds upon the past. Similar to how a wolf cannot form wings from scratch, it requires an iterative process that leaves vestigial layers of the past. The Akkadian legacy in time keeping is equivalent to the redundant finger bones of a whale fin that evolved from the paw of a land mammal.

Language, in this sense, is a process more like the totality of biological life rather than an individual species. The diversity of biological life may witness entire families of species meet their demise, but life continues to proliferate in this environment. Similarly, language may have individual languages and the beliefs that come with them go extinct, consider the invasion of Akkadian into the Australian continent absorbing most speakers into its structure.

Understood in this way, we see a striking contrast between biological evolutionary time which appears relatively steady, compared to linguistic evolution which appears to occur along a much quicker rate of change. Technological revolutions occurring within increasingly smaller

time frames seems to suggest an exponential rate of change. This leads me to believe that language, at least the hegemonic discourse (let's call it Akkadian), will course an extreme trajectory; what that looks like boggles the mind.

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