

Stone Poems

Artist Statement and Process Work Certificate Project

Greg Berman, 7/31/14

I created three poems utilizing process work in response to a call for submission from Artist Adam Cully. The winning poems will be transcribed on concrete slabs around a juvenile tree. The artwork consists of concrete slabs flanked around trees in different configurations (there are three, shown below). The tree will grow and in the process alter the placement and configuration of the slabs. The poems incorporate both the concrete slabs and the tree, in either a literal or figurative sense. The poems I wrote express the process unfold by these distinct entities as opposing forces. Each poem was limited by word count. In the Long Line poem (#1), I utilized the concepts of primary and secondary process and their exploration to connect with the process mind. In the Parallel Bands piece (#3), I explored hierarchy and progression. And in the Cross Hairs Poem (#2) I reflected on personal process.



Artwork #1: Long Line

Brave home spangled age of grass and star. Let the rockets sleep 'til fall. To Cascade rings and water wise by rootlets we dream west, 'O Douglass, in gold, and prey your ramparts to pioneer skies.

Discussion:

The poem expresses two entities as opposing forces: the slabs and the tree. For the concrete slabs I used remnants or words from the 'Star Spangled Banner'. In using the US national anthem, I attempted to represent the essence of the concrete slab as symbols of: establishment, building, permanence,

settlement, ownership, boundary, and property. The tree then represents nature as symbols of: cycles, forces, changes, and seasons as well as growth, aging, death, decay, and renewal.

In process work terms: I see primary process as leaning more towards the concrete slabs. They are like monuments or even gravestones, laid down to express a sense of permanence. But the artwork also expresses change in the twisting and turning of the concrete slabs, so that with time and growth of the tree's roots, there will be some change. Even the tree is seen and predicted as sturdy and somewhat permanent in its positioning to the art. So that the viewer expects this to last through the ages.

Secondary process represents the tree's nature. Yes, the tree will grow, and the rings inside will add on. The roots will twist and turn, but also the tree will change and in its nature be closer to the cycles and rhythms of life. The fall will come, the leaves will die. The tree is much closer to ideas of death in fall and renewal in spring. The leaves grow back. The tree will grow, but also remain exposed to the elements. Maybe a wind storm or lightning will strike it down. Possible it will contract disease. In time the tree will fall and die.

Over time, I envision the tree and the slabs, succumbing to nature and essentially responding as one. So that the changes of the tree will also affect the slab, and the slab will then wear away, perhaps disintegrate or succumb to unexpected change. As both will evolve and decay into dust. They will mix and match until they are one. Their qualities hold both ideas of permanence (the essence of decay now as one and change to dust, or movement into a less physical plane, in memory or spirit).

This interaction of the two sides, in the poem deconstructs the 'Star Spangled Banner' into fragments. The pieces represent breakdown and change that nature brings through cycles (secondary process). The 'spangled age', for example, refers to the troubles of the times that humankind has inflicted on us and the earth, for example war and violence, overdevelopment, misuse/ overuse of resources, global warming, and domination over cultures. These problems are the result of humankind's poor stewardship of the earth. But there are ideas of overcoming and transcendence as well. For example, 'Let the rocket's sleep 'till fall' refers to the missiles and bombs, we hope may go away or evolve as man and civilization may realize the error of these ways, and progress to a further stage. 'Fall' also refers to the season, with dead leaves, or a part of the tree literally dying and renewing. So that in death or the 'fall', this aspect of civilization (the harming of nature and ourselves), may 'die', and in turn humans may evolve.

References to nature mirror, the movement of Western Culture over the continent such as the Cascade mountains of the northwest, filled with Douglass Fir trees, growing, expanding, like America "manifested its destiny" for hopes of discovering gold in the West. But nature has its process of cycles, as we humans, defend against the breaking down of what we see as human-made. "Ramparts", for example, mean defenses, such is in the 'Star Spangled Banner' referring to the barricades holding the American defenses against the British in the War of 1812. . Here the ramparts refer to the concrete lines symbolizing our defense against change and nature. May they 'prey your ramparts to pioneer skies' has double meaning: prey as in let them fall prey to the tree (be destroyed). And the word pray- its meaning implied by sound, looks to higher purpose by laying down lines for them to age. And in the end, nature

brings about change so the structure will give way. Also in these intentions of expansion, are hopes and dreams, and creativity, for example 'dreaming gold' (refers to the high dream of moving west and discovering a 'new' world).

By the point of "in rootlets we dream west", human-king and nature intermingle. For example by creating roots to specific pieces of land, we are committed to the land and its stewardship. There is a hopeful quality of our looking to nature for reverence and guidance. And possibly coming back to nature to help provide wisdom, stability, and solution. Nature, or the stability of the big Douglass Fir Tree, can outlast us and these concrete slabs.

And in the combination of 'concrete' and nature, a merger occurs as the objects and process of both permanence and change become one. In time literally, disintegration and natural process will reduce the tree and concrete to dust. Boundaries between primary and secondary process give way. And in a sense the artwork becomes one distinct entity that will lose any recognizable semblance of the physical body and will last in dreaming as timeless. So that ultimately the spirit will in the 'pieces of this work' transcend to a spiritual realm and continue the process of the pioneers exploring the timeless dream of expansion within the realm of the Process Mind.

Artwork #3: Parallel Bands

haunted

people

play

pray

to the tree

tops and skies

Discussion: Below is an earlier version of the poem:

Black charred hands lay down white cinder and chalk

our roots they always destroy. Haunted people

laugh, play the tree's top. Oh Douglass,

oh hemlock, to the sky.

I came to the story 'haunted people' as reference to a news story about Washington and Lee University. 'Lee' refers to General Lee or head of the Confederate Army. The school is in Virginia and on the campus there is a chapel. Inside is a statue of General Lee with a Confederate flag hung over him, until recently. The student body is 3% African American. Some of those students organized and presented a series of demands to the administration including removal of the flag. This was very controversial in that the University for some time resisted. Many thought the demand ridiculous and counter to tradition. The president did decide to remove the flag, although did not give in to other demands such as declaring Martin Luther King Day a Holiday without classes.

There is a painful history behind the structures of the University. The chapel, like other buildings on campus, was built in part by slaves, and at one point the campus owned 79 slaves. Haunted people refer to both the ghosts of the slaves whose ancestors have never received reparations or full acknowledgement or apology from the other side (many of whom cite heritage and free speech as values behind their position). These people are also 'haunted' by ghosts of the past, suffering from an inability to see and acknowledge wrongs. This denial causes pain felt by the other side to this day (in both the ghost of slaves, and their ancestors, or the African American's of today).

The original poem allows the haunted people to take over the scene and in the process, find a release and transcendence. To 'play the tree tops and skies', is to allow nature to facilitate this shift. Play refers to both playful action, and also music (to play the tree tops).

Because of brevity required on the parallel line slabs, the poem was simplified. I utilized a reversal of hierarchy to order the poem. At the top, are the haunted people, and at the bottom or end of the poem, is nature (the tree tops and skies).

Beyond the literal hierarchy, is an interpretation of a power hierarchy in the history of the United States, with certain cultural groups placed at the bottom, such as slaves and Native Americans. Nature is culturally closer to both of these groups in some respects (for example better understanding of crops, and survival skills). And with a closer relationship comes a better respect for symbiosis of humans with nature. This is a hidden power. The slave owners or even the white Americans in power used artificial means to dominate such as machinery, weaponry, and money. Boundaries of land come from this cultural domination.

The slabs may represent gravestones of haunted people. Here, something has to die or be left behind. Literally that could be the pain in conflict when the group of historical power denies the suffering of the dominated group. So in the poem, nature and its process provide some solution for release and movement. The other place found is the wide open tree tops and sky, presented here as an expansive

image. Again, in this instillation, as the roots grow and the slabs move. The artist like the poem suggests that nature and the people closest to it will prevail, finding healing and release.

Poem #2: Cross Hairs

May thy
rings carry
to Cascade
o'er.

Discussion: Rings refers to the tree, but also the higher powers associated with nature, such as music. The play of sound is meant to create an echo or ring. Rings may represent: cycles, circles, and patterns. There is both stability and coming back around. Again, birth, death, change, and the cycles of life follow the pattern of a ring. And also, in a literal sense, the tree will build internally outward in a series of rings. So the rings may represent a core nature. If one thinks about this in terms of a personal process, the suffering of a symptom which is repetition or a pattern is something to respect as a cycle. For me personally, I think of all the little things I try to modify or control which really are not possible to change. My nature then is to find consistency and patterns, roots or stability but also to fly with the natural cycle from a greater source. This may be unpredictable, or require a 'surrendering to nature' or respect for the natural process. When I am overwhelmed, the forest can provide wisdom. With a mindful gaze, the trees will help me to let go of my worries and pass to another place. Perhaps this is dreaming place, or an imaginative place, or even a place better held by nature (in closer relationship to a higher power or process mind). This is a poem about overcoming our impulse to manipulate, control, and attempt to over- power nature, by creating a delusion of permanence. Again, to look to the Cascade forest is to have faith that it will not manipulate or solve our conflicts but help to carry us o'er (over). Here references to old English are meant to create an 'aged' quality as if the slabs have already been here for a long time. And one personal level, when I internalize the conflict of desire for permanence and manipulation against change, I find myself resisting rather than flowing with my true nature. To look to nature in the external world may then allow the imagination to soar providing greater connection to truest nature. In this way, the poem and art helps with my personal process.

Conclusion: All three poems aim to mark the slabs with a sense of a monument, to something important: a respect and hope for reconnection with nature as a way to endure and transcend our

current conflicts. But also they acknowledge that in time, a transformation may occur to overcome the destructive nature of modern human civilization. We look to nature to assist with such a transformation. And our hope is that with time, nature and human civilization will help each other progress to the next stage. Spirituality or connection to the Process Mind through different means may be interpreted and felt in the poems and the art