

Taxonomy as Exploratory Desire

Thinking about Julie Andreyev's installation *Katabasis* I am reminded of Levi-Strauss' story in *Tristes Tropiques* about his trip to visit the Bororo Indians. His journey was complicated by the fact that bridges for the truck he was in had to be built as required during the journey and then disassembled and carried forward to be transformed into new bridges - they were sublimated objects rather than deconstructed ones as they repeatedly reappeared in modified form. This exhibition of sublimated and re-taxonomized natural objects also recalls what Levi-Strauss, in *The Savage Mind*, called 'the science of the concrete' which is his description of how the relations between myths and objects operate.

In the same way that Levi-Strauss sees myths as *constructing* a set consisting of a linked event and object, Andreyev has constructed a psychologized taxonomy linking the pathos of objects with the events of personal dissolution. In *Katabasis* the psychology of the idea of a return-to-basics is converted into a naturalist's minimalism that, although it echoes minimalist practice, takes its main frame of reference from the consciousness-in-the-material-world hypothesis of Rupert Sheldrake. All the natural objects utilized as displays in the exhibition are indigenous to British Columbia. They are boxed samples of British Columbia. Surveyor's boxes that were once employed to cart the instruments used to plot British Columbia are here forced to hold some of the specific mineral ores that were one of the desired end-points of that plotting. Rocks, like bridge materials, may be transported to the next location where they might be needed. They are the objects linked to the event of exploration, of searching, contributors to myths of progress based on the act of taxonomizing the world.

Andreyev, though, is also re-working other material, especially the story of Psyche and Eros from *The Golden Ass* by Apuleius in which the four labors of gathering, getting, sorting and journeying are a prelude, classical as well as modern/contemporary, for the transformation of substance through the exploration of the metaphorical mutability of objects. Objects and object-relations histories can both play a role in mediating the civil wars that rage on within the self, between self and other, both in Apuleius and in the present. Getting into objects is one way of getting out of our heads - as a temporary relief from the complexity of things. In Psyche's case guidance for her journey was available from nature. The labor of sorting the seeds into taxonomically correct piles, for instance, is undertaken by an army of ants after she gives up on the possibility of completing the work.

The Sisyphean nature of Psyche's labors, building bridges, surfacing from psychic darkness, or ordering the world are all reflected in this installation/ode exploring the idea of 'the survey' as an operative trope for our historical moment. With Smithsonian precision Andreyev has boxed British Columbia minerals, insects and seeds in a rebus of natural forms, converting the gallery into a site merging aspects of natural and cultural, merging the objects of our exploratory desire with some of the devices used in the journey, in the seeking.

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