

Re-Materialising Colour

Date : February 21, 2007

The painter mayor who orchestrated the highly coloured coating of grey post communist buildings in Tirana says in Anri Sala's film 'Dammi I Colore'; 'here colours replace the organs (of the city) whereas in a city that developed naturally colours would be like a dress or a lipstick'.

This film was shown as part of a symposium called '[Re-materialising colour](#)' in September 2006 held at the Centre for Cross Cultural Research at the Australian National University. The intention was to move away from Cartesian models of colour as light and questions about what people perceive and instead address what it is material colour does to things – how for example colour can extend or shrink anything (thing-person) and the implications that has for thinking about things and concepts. Barbara Saunders interrogated the ocular engineering of 'colour' as a post enlightenment phenomenon, a form of colonisation that anthropology should be challenging not accepting as a 'natural' aspect of perception - all perception is socially constructed. Linguist Anna Wierzbicka agreed that there is no universal of 'colour' but proposed another universal in 'seeing' as a commonality to all languages.

Artist Jane Gavan talked about her work with fluoro pink and the way it grabs at you. David MacDougall and Cathy Greenhalgh each discussed greyness in their respective film making. Diana Young talked about colour 'series' in bush foods in central Australia where Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara people conceive colour as a mobile animating quality that is employed to structure space and time.

Diana Young, Research Fellow, Centre for Cross-Cultural Research, Australian National University

MaterialWorldBlog editors would be keen to hear of anyone else exploring colour in their research. With increasing attention focused on the multi-sensorial dimensions of material culture, this weblog could provide the forum for discussing some of these approaches.