

The Symbolic Species - Deacon (Planet: Critical)

<https://youtu.be/trh6YC-KIYE?si=I52qvYYiYwCQfCAW>

MG Comment:

Interesting, as usual. Time is always limited, but I would have liked to hear the speakers' thoughts on two other perspectives on our use of symbols.

First, some implications of Jacques Lacan's conception of the Imaginary and Symbolic functions in the human psyche in relation to the purportedly real world of technology and its physical, biological and mental effects.

But second, maybe more in keeping with the focus of this discussion, the relation of the climate catastrophe to what Kenneth Burke called "the genius of language," whereby our language of itself creates linguistic imaginaries, ideas in a more or less Platonic sense, which we see as possibilities we then try to realize, to actualize, in the (purportedly) extra-linguistic world.

Burke's go-to example in the Cold War era was the idea of nuclear fission, which once thought of impelled us toward creation of the Bomb, and more than that, into actual production and deployment.

That narrative, perhaps more fundamentally than any ideological narrative, is implicit in any number of ideas (eternal life and forever growth come easily to mind) that are intrinsic to the ecological mess we find ourselves in today.

Burke suggests that rather than focus on after-the-fact correction of linguistically-conceived problems (such as Dr. Deacon alludes to), we need to learn how to instill into the linguistic commons specific counter-measures to over-complicate (complexify?) and thus neutralize development of potential frankensteins.

In less technical terms, to touch on both Lacanian and Burkeian notions, we need to insert a very strong moral imperative of restraint into the discussion -- self-restraint on the personal level, linguistic and technological restraint on the level of political economy.

We very much need a global linguistic imaginary

that severely restricts (maybe even precludes) our doing something just because we can, and that subverts the dominant paradigm by infecting it with a moral imperative that asks, How much is enough?

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