

Dust to Data (2021) – Film Transcript

Asase Yaa, Mother of all creation, looked after the earth and all that grew within. An upholder of wisdom and truth, she is the connection between us in the life we know now, and the dust that our bones will meet with. The past feels like such a lonely place these days, forgotten and left, in place of the future. A terrible fiction that will blind us, because of that which has been suppressed, dismembered. [Larry A]

I've been studying skulls. Triangles of truth across times. What does it matter that my ideas are flawed? Linnaeus simply made up categories out of vague observation and hearsay, so why shouldn't I propose an intrinsic link between skull size and intellect? Those women are just interrupting the natural order of things, with their treaties and so-called evidence. Can't they see how elegant this explanation is? Everyone has their place within god's creation. [David B]

It disappoints me, that even in this time of heightened, hyper connected bodies, that these methods, both historical and very contemporary, are allowed the space to breathe, through the institutions, to entertainment, to the feeds we scroll through via social. The layers of masks that hold a hollow fakery to the so-called truths.

I am sorry to see that apparently, you sympathize with methods...which have been, to my mind, only too much in vogue during the world's history -the stern driving of men, the denial of education, and the general assumption that men must remain as they are for an indefinite time. To all these I take very serious exception.

As impressive as these great machines are, they will meet their end. Dust to Data. Data to Dust.

The contours in the lines in the soil find patterns in the distribution of the code.

You model the past. But you can't help modelling this past using those structures that benefit you. That you live in comfortably. The past models you. But you can't help seeing the present wrapped tightly within structures that the history has embedded. That are embedded in you.

Mark this blade. Is it not sharp? How many edges would have had to be fashioned to find this true edge, to refine this tool? This single sliver of stone is evidence of a culture, of a thinking mind. A dreaming mind. To see the blade within the stone. Hundreds of thousands of years ago. Before the wise. Not yet human, but who can say that the hand that forged this blade is not a person? What is it to be human? There is talk of primitive cultures or people, little realising within that language, it cannot be denied that these are the first people.

Take this bottle. You say it is a historical broken bottle with coral. But which coral? Kingston coral. When was it archived? 1860. It was exhibited at colonial trade fair exhibition. A representation of empire, that became an artefact in the commonwealth institute. These objects belong to you. And every object here tells you a story about your history. [Larry A]

You like boundaries. You like labelling, lumping into groups, splitting into factions. Think about it. Examine it. Label it and measure it. In many ways, the image has come to usurp genetic reality. The label of *Homo sapiens* is largely arbitrary. Evolution is such a long continuum. Language goes back millions of years. It wasn't that we were dumb, then suddenly the hand of god comes down and we started to talk, started to communicate. Human exceptionalism is a powerful drug. We were forced to bear witness to the history of this naming. To who has the power to name. To cast is to mark, and to control.

The academy is wary of change, of changing understandings of the past, and the deep past, and with that, they mould these new ways of thinking in order to manipulate them. Careers need to be protected. And investments must thrive. The hierarchies baked into the code. Into the hot earth to be excavated. These separations are there in Linnaeus, in the construction of lineages, of discrete kingdoms and phyla. Stay in your place, it is written. In the word. And executed in the deed. In confinement and beatings, in partitions and rulings. [David B]

The intention, driven by the beating impulse, and a need to speak. This need to harbour the environment is in its design racist. A righteous cause driven by a folly.

You're terrified that if understandings change, everything will fall apart.

Within the Archaeology of Human Origins, the European record has always been held up as the pinnacle, the default, by which we judge African finds. The European history, of caves, paintings and bones, was the basis, the origin of the studies, so it's seen as the benchmark, the default. Through this process, a set of norms was established, where the origins of Homo Sapiens was seen through a Eurocentric lens. This is how people in the past should have looked like if they were homo sapiens "like us".

In Homo sapiens, this so-called white skin colouring is very recent. It's not something that goes deep into the past. It's not that suddenly when hunter gatherers arrived in Europe forty thousand years ago they turn white. Geneticists say that until very recently hunter gatherers in Britain ten thousand, even six thousand years ago were dark skinned.

Archaeology was born of the colony, used by colonial administrations to gather information about who they were administering. A way of finding out, who is here, who were they, what they were doing and how they can tax them. And then control them.

Our stories are in flux. The past is a collective story, a story that we make.

So, we must remake it now. Our stories are monitored and collated, shaped by the algorithm. Data best left buried.

[David B]

Gene flows. It has flowed across continents. Neanderthals were part of my flow. Me- an organic node in the passage of deep time. Any strict definition of origin thus risks oversimplifying the continuous and complex, and in many aspects unknown, nature of the deep human past.

The more we find out, the less we know.

But it's evident that the answers aren't simple. Because genes flow.

Across time, across species.

What was past has always been here. There are so many hidden histories, so many concealed stories. A hundred thousand years of history is with us now, in our blood, and bones, in the thousands of stories in our heads. In the sand that's running through my fingers, in the dirt below my feet. This dismembered heritage, willing itself to be reconstructed, reformed.

So let us drink to your fear, your fear of a change that is inevitable. Your fear that if the old understandings change, all your power, built in blood and bones, and maintained by fictions, will return... to dust. [Larry A]