

Cultural Abstraction

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January 4, 2023

At first glance, the films of me doing mundane acts seems like an amateur vlog or a subtle opposition to status quo films like in "Saute ma Ville." But what I really wanted people to see is how our definition of human changes through time, mutates and evolves alongside culture and the way our bodies move following suit. This is like a second skin of humanity, an extra set of cultural signifiers that mean "human", adding to the set of things that mean human, a "cultural abstraction." It is an abstraction in the sense that culture molds and is absorbed into our sense of humanity, our definition of meaning and fundamentally changes in the way we move and the way we think. To most people we become aware of the cultural abstraction when they are confronted with a different culture that fights with our own internalized

or individual culture (we will talk about this later), and I think that Americans are so caught up in this cultural abstraction with concepts of American exceptionalism, consumerism, etc. that they must externalize this. A perfect example of this projection of culture is the Red Scare and the oppression of leftist Latin American leaders, where American's identity of capitalism is so intertwined with their identity of self that the idea of others having a system opposite of theirs became a moral struggle for what "good", "proper" or "right" is. Domestically politicians knew this and would often make communism a villain in opposition of America, not of capitalism, and would label communists as traitors. A problem with cultural abstraction is this sense of moral objectivism, narcissism and entitlement that comes from not recognizing that these sets of cultural signifiers are not universal and vary through time and peoples.

But this cultural abstraction is not limited to high level concepts but personal things, the idea of a story that defines you, the idea of a highschool or college experience, things that change our definition of ourselves and how we act separate from our biology and lived experience, and instead is built upon culture. Here I should probably explain my use of "culture", by culture I mean the collective, cumulative ideas, knowledge and traditions of a society, ever changing and evolving. So then this idea of a cultural abstraction can also be defined as this story

we tell ourselves through culture, this story that we use as a guideline to be human. But we should make clear the difference, cultural abstraction is the phenomenon of human identity but this individual story is the personalized rendering of this cultural abstraction, since everyone's experience is different, so let us call this "the personal story" from now on.

Our existence from the first toy, to the first T.V. we see, to the language we speak is built from the centuries of interplay between the people and the culture, building upon each other creating webs of complexity and new stories of meaning for people to follow. The way I think, work and move are entirely different than those of people 10 years ago, then imagine 20, 50, 100. So this film and Artists statement acts as a sort of anthropology for our time, the way I move through cooking, typing, working all things previously unknown and mundane to us, but in a few decades this slice in the evolution of culture, technology and society will be fascinating and foreign. An example of this personal story I used before is an anecdote from a friend who was struggling with his attraction to other girls while having a girlfriend, and this attraction caused enough mental anguish to drive him to depression and seek therapy. I am not condoning infidelity but using this anecdote to show the power of cultural abstraction to make you believe in these new signifiers of what a "proper" human is, like monogamy. Another

good example is the movie “500 Days of Summer”, where the main character’s identity, concept of humanity, was built upon cultural abstraction through the idea of love and the ethos of romance movies. We see how he can not recognize that this “personal story” of love he follows is not an objective definition of love for humans but his own narrative built by the culture around him. So when confronted with Summer, whose beliefs challenge his, he can not accept his different reality, ignoring her and projecting his notions of love onto her and lost when breaking up. The final example I will use is the genre of “apocalypse films.” Here I think the reason for our fascination with apocalypse films is due our fundamental understanding of cultural abstraction. In apocalypse films we see culturally abstract humans from modernity with their dreams and meaning ripped from them; their foundation and definition of humanity and reality are now gone and now we see these humans from a slice of the cultural timeline to be put in a sudden situation they did not come out from and thus we are fascinated. We see ourselves in this dilemma, invoking a primal fear of uncertainty and the unknown where our objective baseline for meaning is ripped, no more enjoyment of your favorite coffee shop, no more nervousness of a first date at a hip new restaurant, no more familiar fear, hopes or dreams. In my film I show how happy I am at cooking a dish correctly, working and typing, but in another time a man would not know how to cook, the technology

of typing didn't exist, and I wouldn't dance to a nicely cooked meal, my body movement, joys and angers are the product of the time and slice in this cultural abstraction that I have lived in. Without this artist's statement there could be a variety of interpretations from a cultural studies perspective. The abundance of food I have, the joy I have in cooking, and the anger I express in doing work could be interpreted as a representation of class privilege, where my worries and anger are superficial compared to the economic struggles of more disenfranchised peoples. This can be interpreted as the ignorance of the middle class, and more broadly America's ignorance to the oppression of global capitalism, where our own citizens live privileged lives with food and beds, while the labor to make the bed and the fertilizer of the food are exploited from underpaid children in South East Asia. The lack of a face in the film can also be interpreted as racial solidarity, without looking at my face you can't discern my race and yet you can see me go through the same struggles, joys and mundanity of life as anyone else and race has no factor in it. You can see my hands but you wouldn't focus on that would you? The face is the may most distinguish race and without it we nearly don't think about it. Now, another analysis of the film is that my ability to type, walk, dance and get into bed can be a foil to people who don't have the ability to do so and thus can be interpreted as a way to empathize with people who are physically disabled and dissuade ableism.

The whole point is that there is no objective interpretation of the film, no matter how mundane or my intended purpose. Without the artist the piece of art still exists, the meaning can still be discovered and the fundamental meaning can change through time and cultures. What makes art so beautiful is the infinite interpretation and unpredictable impact it has on people. Even if I am gone, this clip can act as a piece of anthropology, a message about consumerism or whatever fits people's personal story.