

## ACT 3

## SCENE 2 - THE LECTURE

(Scene is a big lecture hall at a university. In the lecture hall there is a podium with a simple lectern. Sloping rows of seats face the podium. About three quarters of the seats are occupied by students from different faculties of the university.)

(applause as Lecturer enters the hall and walks up to the lectern)

## LECTURER

Thank you, thank you.

Ok...

(fiddles with some papers)

Is this thing on?

(taps the microphone, thumps through the PA)

Ok...

(pause)

First things first, we don't know why we are. The simplest question: Why are we?

(pause to let it sink in)

And the follow-up: Would it be better or worse not to be than to be?

(pause to let it sink in)

Why do these molecules move and interact, the molecules that constitute us? What made the first molecule move and interact with the second molecule? What made the second molecule play along with the first?

(pause)

LECTURER (continued)

What is the difference between a hamster and a diamond?

(pause, laughter from the audience)

Why are there molecules at all?

Why is there matter?

Why is there anything?

(pause to let it sink in)

And the follow-up: Would it be better or worse if there wasn't anything?

(pause to let it sink in)

We don't know the answers to these basic questions:

Why are we? (pause)

Why is there anything?

(pause)

When I'm saying that we don't know the answers, I might be a bit provocative. Some people do know the answers. They have a conviction to a faith, a great religion, a personal faith or a social or political faith. I am to serve God, I am to serve my family, I am to be rich, I am to work for Greenpeace. Some people claim to have actually communicated with God, still they would be hard pressed finding an answer when asked: Why is there God?

(pause, some giggle from audience)

Other people with other faiths will be hard pressed when asked:

Why is there people to care about?

Why is there matter to buy?

Why is there a planet with living things to save from extinction?

(pause, some laughter in audience)

If they are smart and come up with an answer, you can always continue asking: "Why is there this-and-that?" It is easy rhetoric. Like this: "Because it is the truth!" "Why is there truth?" Try it out, it is fun!

LECTURER (continued)

(Lecturer smiling wittingly, audience laughing)

Anyway, seriously, back to the thread of thoughts here...

Ok...

This is the human condition. We simply do not know why we exist, but we know that we exist, at least we are pretty sure of it. I am pretty sure that I am lecturing, you might be pretty sure that you are being lectured to. We might be imagining it all, but even then our imagination exists, so we have some kind of existence anyhow. And we still don't know why.

From this point of departure, that we exist, but don't know why, you can follow many paths of thought. Today, however, I will only follow one of these paths and on that path I will leap ahead to this practical and pragmatic world we live in.

(pause)

So we are existing, we have an existence. We don't know why, and we don't know if to exist is better or worse than to not exist. But this existence is all we got.

So what are we to do with it? This is a pretty open question. But as to what we are actually doing? Well, in practice, it seems that people are doing quite similar things with their existences.

(pause)

People share... we share a lot of more or less forceful precedents and codes for our existences, which we take clues from or adhere to. We walk, we eat with knife and fork, we work, we talk, etc, etc. We all do these things, but on top of that we all do them in similar ways...

(Lecturer looks at papers on the lectern)

...and \*on top of that\* we do them in ways hierarchically ordered.

LECTURER (continued)

These precedents and codes for our existences, which we take clues from or adhere to, form the backbone of what we call culture.

(pause)

If not knowing why we are is the human condition, then culture is the human collective condition.

(pause)

Culture happens whenever people expose and share their will, view, experience and knowledge to and with other people. From a conversation to a war to a painting in an exhibition, everything is in the realm of culture. And everything has the potential to reproduce culture or to change culture.

A war, for example, changes culture fundamentally if there was no war before. Lives become worthless, killing becomes survival, group becomes more important than individual, etc, etc.

(pause)

If there was war before, however, another war reproduces culture.

(pause)

A painting can also change culture, in its composition, its motive, its concept, it can challenge the way we see ourselves and our surroundings and change culture. A painting can also confirm culture, in other words reproducing it.

(pause)

To be fair, culture is constantly, constantly reproducing and changing, it isn't simply a matter of war or no war, or some other event or state or introduction of an artifact. It isn't on and off; cultural reproduction and change is constant.

(pause)

LECTURER (continued)

A brief glance through history shows how the way people live and interact has been shaped and reshaped. Just take marriage and education for example, and start looking backwards through time. In both content and form and relevance they have been reshaped profoundly. Malleability is one of the characteristics of culture. But who is doing all this shaping of culture?

(pause)

Answer is:

Culture is shaped by people, in a ratio dependent on their leverage in culture.

Leverage can be a lot of things:

Ingenuity

Rhetoric ability

Inventiveness

Collective strength

Authority

Respect

Ownership

Capital

Status

Hard work

Determination

Bureaucracy

To inspire fear

To inspire admiration

To inspire action

and so on and so forth, and of course the final leverage, the leverage to end all leverages:

Weapons, guns, bombs, punches, bayonets, kicks, missiles, mines, napalm, knives, barbed wire, electrical fences, flame throwers, gas chambers.

(pause)

Biggest gun isn't always the most leverage. But, again glancing briefly at history, if you have ingenuity, rhetoric ability, collective strength and are inspiring action...

...if you have all those, you'll probably get shot.

LECTURER (continued)

(a few spread laughters from the audience)

Kids watch out, I am not joking. Gandhi, Martin Luther King... obviously...  
and a lot of labour union activists worldwide are to this day shot for that kind of leverage. It is no secret.

(pause)

I feel the need for some comic relief here... hmmm...  
here we go:

The Soviet president is about to read the opening speech at the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow. He coughs, and starts: Oh... Oh... Oh... Whereupon his assistant rushes up and whispers in his ear: No, no, those are the Olympic rings, the speech starts down there!

(Lecturer smiling, some giggles from the audience)

Ok... maybe not that funny. Still, the differences and similarities in those days between the cultures of USSR and USA, the way of living, of thinking, of working and of joking is quite interesting.

(pause, Lecturer smiling wittingly, looking some members in the audience in their eyes, scanning for feedback)

Well, I at least think it is interesting. And a bit funny.

(some giggle and some laughter from the audience)

Ok... back to the subject.

(pause)

Culture might seem oppressive, but to opt out of culture entirely is almost impossible. That would mean carrying nothing but your own experiences in your consciousness.

(pause)

## LECTURER (continued)

The consciousness is the foremost place where culture resides, the consciousness is filled with culture. As a species, that is part of the human success story of conquering the planet. It is much faster to change a species' behaviour by changing its consciousness, than it is to change its genes. You can change consciousness several times in a generation... again a brief glance at history: Racism, colonialism, environmentalism... hell, look at an average German from 1920 to 1970 and smell the change of culture and consciousness. It is supreme adaptability, far beyond Darwinism.

(pause)

So the consciousness is filled with culture. The mechanisms of filling it are interesting enough, but how do you opt out of culture?

There is the exciting possibility of establishing a non-cultural consciousness, a unique, individual one. And I mean unique not only in its composition, but also in the elements making up the composition. Each one of us could have a unique consciousness, since there is a vastness of potential outside of culture that there isn't inside of it. Culture represents a lot of knowledge and options for actions, but the actual field of possible knowledge and options for actions is infinite, limitless. This limitless infinity is outside of culture.

(pause)

To opt out of culture you have to use your own imagination and investigative skills. You have to start thinking in other ways than those culture dictates. You have to change your manners and actions into something other than what culture dictates. You have to make your own knowledge. You cannot tell anyone or rely on anyone else informing you what to do or how to think, because then you are making culture.

The only problem is that if you reach a non-cultural consciousness, you cannot share it with anyone else. If you do that you will be making culture. So no one would know about your non-cultural consciousness, and equally you wouldn't know of someone else's non-cultural

LECTURER (continued)

consciousness. It sounds a bit dull.

(pause, some giggle from the audience)

It is a pragmatic paradox: The intrigue of going outside of culture versus the dullness of not communicating it with anyone.

There are moments when people reach partial non-culturality. Imagine the philosopher coming up with a revolutionary idea and not sharing it with anyone. Imagine a composer making a piece of music with unheard of tonality, timbres and sequences, and not playing it to anyone. These events occur, the ones we know about are the ones interrupted by the philosopher or composer when finally sharing their work with the rest of us.

(pause)

Of course, to completely opt out of culture is ridiculously hard. Even the philosopher and the composer have learned about philosophy and music through culture. It goes deeper than that, to the roots of our lives. Opting out of culture is really, really hard.

(pause)

Most people are born from a mother, and most people are born in a ritual, be it institutional or religious. Interaction with mother makes culture, institution is culture, religion is culture. Smack! You're in the middle of it!

(pause, some laughter from audience)

Most people grow up in culture, you have someone taking care of you, someone showing you what and how to eat, how to move, how to communicate. For most people culture is inescapable. Indeed, for most creatures on our planet, human culture is inescapable, since it is manifesting itself as cities, roads, pollution, mines, landfills.

(pause)

LECTURER (continued)

Now things are getting edgy. People are filling this world with culture, culture manifested as matter, as artefacts, as landscaping, as cities, as dams, as mixes of chemicals in dirt, air and water. We are actually transforming and designing our entire habitat, our entire planet. We are making it into culture.

(pause)

And we are doing this without knowing why we are. We are doing this without knowing why anything is.

(pause)

And as we do this, we lose the possibility to reference ourselves against something else, to reference against something outside of culture. We are hardwiring this particular culture into cities, landscapes, infrastructure and the planet itself, the entire habitat. Even if culture is constantly changing, there are some core characteristics that are constantly reproduced. We are running the risk of continuously repeating ourselves, repeating this particular cultural configuration on and on and thus diminishing our potential as individuals, as a collective, as a culture, as a species.

That would be all good if we agreed on this culture, if we knew that this culture is serving us supremely. However, there is no agreement and there is no way to know that this particular, or any other, culture is the supreme one.

(pause)

We need to be cautious about what culture is and what we want it to be. Culture is malleable, it is constantly changing and reproducing. We are able to change it into something else, something that might suit us better. It is always possible. We can be active players of the cultural game.

(pause, Lecturer looks at the papers on the lectern)

Oh, I'm a bit over time here, there was supposed to be a

LECTURER (continued)

break... ok, i'll round this off, then we take five minutes coffee break and I'll be back for a more open dialogue, some questions and some more lecturing perhaps, afterwards. I hope you'll be back too.

Alright...

We don't know why we are.

We don't know why anything is.

We live together in a culture, which is constantly changing and reproducing.

(pause)

I would say this as final words:

Be very suspicious of belief systems claiming to know the truth or to know what is right. None of them can answer the most basic questions, you can ask their proponents. Since they don't know the most basic answers, they have little firm ground for their claims. Be especially suspicious of dominating belief systems, like economic and legal systems, religion or science. When you hear of a new booming economic sector, of a new law, a religious decree or a new scientific study, ask yourself an important question:

How does this fit into culture?

How does this change or reproduce culture?

(pause)

Do I want that change or reproduction?

(pause)

Thank you!

(great applause from audience. Lecturer is waving shortly with one hand and leaves the podium and lecture hall. Applause continues, but is fading as the audience starts leaving the hall)

Daniel Persson - Nyfikenhet  
Spring 2008  
AAHM01: Degree Project in Architecture  
LTH, Lund, Sweden  
danielperssondeluxe [you know] gmail.com  
danielpersson.info

Tutor: Christer Malmström  
Examiner: Lars-Henrik Ståhl