

Inspiration from the Unconnected and the Absurd

I happened upon the STRFKR video for their song "Atlantis" today, and it makes little to no sense. Actually, the video may have some profound deeper meanings, but I am not letting that detract from my enjoyment of it. In other words, I am letting my core reaction to the film shape my interpretation, not the other way around. I am not, as many an English teacher trained me to do, dissecting the piece for the creator's intent, letting the interpretation dictate my reaction.

Watch the video for yourself:

<http://youtu.be/1EL03PI4oL4>

The video has obvious playful elements, a level of absurdest humor similar to the TV shows *Portlandia* or *Comedy Bang Bang*. But the images in the video still have space enough to capture elements of reality, whether intended or not.

The runners in the first scene and the "athletes" on the lawn are spraying water almost without fail for 20 of the first 30 seconds of the video. The image almost gives the impression of unfamiliarity with athletics, as though based in the thought: Athletes are always so wet; running and playing sports must be about spitting water. The vampire selling blood has written his sign with a dripping white paint, creating the inverse effect we would normally expect -- the red is solid, the white appears liquid, blood-like. The dancing women, dancing in reverse, appear to be components of some ornate, misguided or misfiring protest. There is a happy strawberry and a food fight, and I think about -- for reasons perhaps beyond myself -- of *Alice in Wonderland*.

I may not understand the meaning of these disconnected images, but I can let them into my frame of reference. Maybe they flavor a poem I write later this week or help build a sentence I need for a short story. Maybe the images and sounds ferment into more clear thoughts; maybe they latch onto a memory and become a story of their own. For these purposes, I do not need understanding, but receptivity.

Like an excellent poem -- one with carefully crafted words, a language that drips like honey -- value and sense are not mutually yoked. We can let the words wander through our minds and allow our own meaning and understanding insert itself into the sounds. I never encountered this possibility more discretely than when reading Ben Lerner's *Mean Free Path* (here's [an excerpt](#)). Lerner, who was a guest lecturer at the Winter 2013 MFA residency period, is perhaps the most intelligent poet, possibly person, I have ever encountered, and his poetry reads almost like scrambled computer code. To maintain my own sanity, to pull any meaning from his work, I had to learn to absorb rather than understand, to find inspiration through the unconnected and the absurd. And it is a practice I now look to implement every day and in any ways I can. It is the power to turn confusion into inspiration, and it can be a powerful asset in the writer's toolbox.