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Shadow puppet, Lenong Folk Theatre, and Video Games: Reflection of Aspective, Perspective, and Inspective Intuition

The ways human seeing and representing the world from very ancient age until today have resulted different shapes of the world: how logic was/is constructed, science and knowledge built, and art and ethic created, each has given some consequences. While scientific knowledge is built using interpretation base on objectivity and rationality, various fields of art create they knowledge based on so-called "individual experience". Based on the classification of Egyptologist Emma Brunner-Traut, Juha Varto classifies human intuition into three categories, such as aspective, perspective, and inspective. This paper will discuss the general issue of these three intuitions and their reflection in art performances and media such as Javanese shadow puppet, Jakarta's Lenong folk theatre, and video games. The aim is to show the basic distinction between those three approaches, and to call for making a shift from perspective to inspective culture, if we want to achieve comprehensive understanding of the world.

Aspective intuition

It could be said that aspective intuition is the basic character of human in responding and representing the object or the world surrounding. As appeared in many drawings of ancient societies, the picture in aspective intuition is usually flat two-dimensional. A person with aspective intuition draws things not the way he sees it, but he draws the way he knows it. The drawing might be as a "map-like" picture, where each component freely placed in any angle and direction to provide the best information. This clever free-arrangement helps to expose any hidden part of the drawn

object in order to be seen clearly, which is not the case, for example, in perspective drawing.

For most people today, paintings and drawings created by aspective culture are usually seen not as a coherent picture, as they typically sized objects and characters according to their spiritual or thematic importance. If necessary, the scale and proportion of object or anatomy can be re-arranged to express some important symbols. For examples, woman's breast drawn in overly un-proportional-huge related to her body to symbolize the fertility, or king's figure is double sized from his servant and the rest of ordinary people to show the honour and great status of him.

Interestingly, most of children in their nature still draw objects in a flat-two dimension form just like the way ancient societies and many primitive tribes around the globe do. As I did when I was child, my six years old son draws a house in a 2D-flat and transparent way, so we can see what is there inside the house: chairs, table, hanging lamp, and people. The same case appears when he draws a car. We can see clearly the car's seat, the driver, and unusual big shape of steering wheel: probably to emphasize its big role in controlling and driving a car. Other landscape's components, such as the roads, trees, people, and houses are put freely in 'informative' and overlapping arrangement. The roads are drawn as we see from up (bird view), rather than drawing only one horizontal line as it should appear in natural situation. The houses and pedestrian are placed in different coordinates, to be synchronized with the road's angle and position. This type of children' drawing makes every situation in the landscape is possible to be seen. It is a basic picture but powerfully informative!

Similar characteristic seems to be emerged also in shadow puppet performance. When I was child, shadow puppet performance was still as an entertainment for everybody. It was performed all night long as a part of wedding party and other ceremonial events. This Javanese shadow puppet, called 'wayang kulit', is two-dimensional puppet live-performance that use screen to mediate the audience and the puppets. The whole shadow performance is supported by 'gamelan' music, a traditional Javanese orchestra. The puppets are performed by a puppeteer, called 'dalang', who sits in front of a screen. The puppets, which are made of flat-perforated pieces of buffalo skin, are operated mutually with using light source in such a way, so the light creates shadows of the puppets on the screen. With this technique the audiences see the live-shadow performance on a screen rather than see directly the puppets. The function of the light is to give the

effect of movement, place and deepness, makes some overlapping images possibly performed in one moment.

As Sastroamijoyo (1964) notes, "the puppets are curiously enough 'shadow'-like, so when holding a puppet, one is holding in fact a 'solid shadow'. The generic name of these puppets is 'shadow', so that the shadow on the screen is nothing less than a 'shadow of a shadow'".

Most Javanese people believe that the shadow puppet show represents the Javanese way of life in solving problems of the world. Using the story of classic 'Mahabarata', the plot starts with problems. Thus, war, love, and intrigues are 'rationally' analysed. In this rush it is shown that rational, conventional or 'linear' thinking is not sufficient to 'solve the problem'. The 'dalang' then introduces the 'goro-goro' or 'time of trouble' that everything is brought back to the 'primogenital chaos or void', which is in fact pregnant with power and potentialities that infinity. The lesson is: everything is linked with everything else, nothing is stagnant, and works in a never-ending process. This approach is somehow close to Tao-ism philosophy, "The myriad creatures in the world are born from something, and something from nothing".

'Goro-goro' session is told in ordinary language combined with jokes so this makes the audiences more relax. It is just in this relaxation, audiences easily receive the 'teaching-joke' and 'teaching-story'.

Certainly, the way shadow puppet is showed has many aspects of aspective culture. It is two-dimensional moving pictures combined with music that projecting a complex relationship of plots, information, teaching and wisdom. Some additional shapes on a screen are temporary used to represent place, time, and plot. In this kind of performance the real content of the totality-underlying story cannot only be expressed in words or language.

Perspective intuition

The essence of perspective in drawing or painting is to show things as they appear, not as they are. The nature of all perspective drawings assumes a viewer in a certain distance away from the drawing, and objects are scaled relative to that viewer. Consequently, appreciator's attitude of 'keeping the

distance' with the observed object becomes the most spirit of perspective intuition: the subject must have a distance with the object!

Generally speaking, most scientific knowledge operates in the corridor of perspective intuition. To be objective and having adequate validity, the scientist or researcher has to make distance with the object that being researched, as same as the theory is built by seeing from distance. Seeing from distance means we observe a thing or object without considering the colourful experience of our senses. Thinking with perspective is believed, especially in Western tradition, very important in order to understand the world.

In addition, many video games that were introduced for the first time in 1947, are just perfect media for illustrating the way perspective intuition works. To play the game, the player first has to study and understand the rule and the logic of game. One usually uses a tool to control the play, which projected on the screen of TV or computer. The gaming topic and the degree of difficulties might differ in vast variation, for instances, the most popular games today are related to such topics as war, adventure, sport, and education. Recent modern technology has made possible such multi-layer interface that combines narration, sound, and three-dimensional images.

For mastering the game, one can empirically study and observe each case, exercise the probabilities, and get a try to find out in which methods are the best to solve the problem. During the game, all mistakes happen all the time, but it does not affect so much –bodily- to the player. In a war game, for example, the gamer could get shot and die many times, but nothing physically hurt in her/his real existence. In such virtual moment, one can always recover from the injury, because she or he is in fact not bodily involved in the game. Even though the player may be really excited when playing, anyway she or he can not sense the pain of being injured, the internal war of doubt, shock and guilty feeling while shooting hundred of bodies. The fact is there is anyway a clear existing distance between the player and the game: the game is there on the screen, and the player is somewhere else. That is exactly how perspective system works; the doer is there at the distance with the thing, the done.

A person who is trained in a perspective culture sometimes has difficulties in thinking outside the perspective boundary. As one good example, is my experience when attending experimental visual art class in my first year study at Art College twenty-five years ago. In one session, the teacher gave

us -the fresh art students- a task to draw such a situation like this: "imagine that you are inside some kind of building, from one window you are viewing a market square in front of you, post office building at the left side, department stores at the right side, and sport hall at back yard". As we had to draw that illustration into one drawing, more than nineteen percent of students have difficulties to manage drawing that task, putting four elements from different axles. Most students have succeeded to draw such a situation where only two or three components of view exist, for example Market Square, post office and department store building. According to our logic and rationality at that time, it is just impossible to include the last component –the sport hall in the backyard- into the drawing, since human ability to view object at best cannot be wider than 180 decrees angle. So rationally, if we have to draw a coherent picture, we then need to skip one or two component undone.

It was very embracing but also enlightenment, after our teacher showed some alternative results for the problem. Of course, the pictures were such flat drawings as commonly used by aspective cultures. With different kind of styles, they exactly illustrated all situations required: a flat drawing of one building with the observer by the window, placed in the centre of drawing, thus market square, post office, department store, and sport hall were located in the circle of it. Simple and informative!

Certainly, the reason of this difficulty -uncompleted drawing- is centred to our brain that has been trained too much to see things in a perspective way. In perspective culture we are much trained to draw something we see, but we loss many ability to represent everything we know. As 'well' trained student, we have forgotten the way we drew as small children. We also forgot how the shadow puppet performance can create multiple layer of images in one small-single-screen.
Inspective intuition

The word 'inspective' is originally from Latin 'inspectivus', which means to view closely in critical appraisal, to look over, engaged in inspecting, and involving inspection. In engineering the word inspective is used to describe the point of understanding. There is phrase such as "Inspective Testing", which method helps us to understand more about the product we have built.

The fundamental distinction between perspective with inspective intuition is that when perspective always requires distance with the observed object, inspective intuition obliges an engagement, involvement, or participation with the observed object. In other words, when we are to know the knowledge of water, we then have to jump and be wet in the water. Being inside the water, we can touch, smell, taste, feel, and hear the sound of water.

To discuss this issue from other view, let me introduce 'Lenong', a traditional-folk theatre from Jakarta. It is a kind of performing art that usually represents the social lives of local society. It performs in particular place and time for entertainment or for expressing aesthetical sense, emotion, and anxiety that could not be said out aloud. Therefore, it is a perfect media for emotion release and delivering the 'voice of voiceless' of ordinary people in order to be heard by local authority. Lenong performance includes also live music orchestra called 'gambang kromong' which is different from traditional Javanese 'gamelan' music orchestra, in the way that it combines some Chinese instruments.

Lenong's scenario contents usually moral issues, such as helping the poor and oppressed people, battling against greediness, corruption, and other destructive minds, but performed in humorous way as a comedy theatre. For that reason, the main roles in Lenong theatre usually consists of character such as the master or the boss, the guards, the servant, the oppressed, and the last is the hero: a Wiseman who always ready to help somebody in difficult situation.

The basic characteristics of Lenong are simple, spontaneous, and integrated. What makes Lenong very special is in the way it opens the interaction with the audiences. All Lenong actors often make "acrobats", moving dynamically between different roles: as an actor, an orchestra player, and an audience, which can happen any time. This changing roles helps to keep all components involved and be active in the happening. So, it is a normal situation in Lenong show to have continuously open dialogs between the actors, orchestra music players, and audiences. When the dialogs between the audiences and actors get emotionally closer, it would be easier for audiences to catch up and have deep understanding of the performance's important message. Having this characteristic, it is believed that this kind of art performance could be as media of communication and solving social problems.

Relating to the main discussion, I suppose that this Lenong way of performing has close relationship with the inspective intuition idea. While seeing Lenong performance, as the audience and as a part of the whole happening, we will strongly feel a self-involvement, an engagement with the whole, since there is no distance between me –the audience- and the performance. There is no clear separation of subject and object. The only thing we see is the assimilation of them. In Lenong the audiences actively engage together with the performers making jokes and solving their social problems. It is just exactly inspective culture operates: to jump and be wet together in the water.

Reflection

Shadow puppet, video games, and Lenong theatre are three forms of art media that might reflect three major intuitions in human history: aspective, perspective, and inspective. We may also reflect these three intuitions into research works where understanding, developing or even searching (new) knowledge becomes one of the main aims. The main question is "How should we place our self when seeing and trying to understand the world?"

In aspective culture, things are represented as they are known and believed. Thus, after the dissemination they have to be saved in the absolute discourse. Therefore, in aspective societies, knowledge will be knowledge if it is absolute. Similarly, truth is truth if it is absolutely truth. Consequently, in this conceptualisation, knowledge acts as same as truth, excluding from the self/person, time, and place.

As discussed earlier, the way shadow puppet is performed with its multi-layer images and places pretty much represents the characteristic of aspective traditions. However, it can also be argued that the content of teaching-story reflects the idea of representation of inspective culture. As Purwadi and Dwiyanto (2006) notes, "the whole shadow puppet performance represents the worldview of the Javanese, that everything is connected with everything else, that nothing is static, everything is only 'be coming' or process, and the process of all power is the primogenial void". This philosophy mirrors to what Heideger states about the dynamic concept of the life-world (lebenswelt) that only the change is real, and only dynamic makes sense to the life.

On one hand, playing video games seems to be a model of perspective intuition. The way the player having a distance with the game, the way she or he acquires the understanding of knowledge through experimental and empirical approach, and its non-fully-involvement, are all the characteristic of perspective tradition. As already mentioned, the essence of perspective lays in its separation between the observer and the observed object. On the other hand, as means of communication, the interface of recent video games, reflects not only the perspective method, but also the richness of technical approaches, such as employing map, scheme, diagram, narration, music, and other information, which technique might reflect some of the aspective mode.

From other view, knowledge in perspective culture is constructed in empirical way by making interpretations of the world. Thus, interpretation becomes the main thing in knowledge, where many theories are built and seen from the "distance". The institution of knowledge, replicated from perspective's "horizon", is a belief system; seems to be shared by many people, and "truth" is seen as something clear and uncovered. In perspective culture, every detail and the colourful of individual experience are selectively reduced. As a consequence, every singular-individual, which is unique, particular, and different has to be seen using generalisation: "what is the common thing shared by the individuals?" In this sense, knowledge is separated from individual or personality.

The lenong folk theatre is an art performance that requires high involvement of its audience in order to solve the problem of everyday lives. Unlike the case of most perspective approach, there is no distance between the observer and the observed. As the audience in lenong, one would feel a sense of self-engagement through the whole process by jumping together into the ocean of problem. In this way, you locate your self as part of the problem –the object- you are trying to understand and solve. This is the essence of how inspective intuition works. Stop just looking at the world, and start to hear, taste and touch!

In searching knowledge, inspective society places the individual in the centre of object being observed. Therefore there need no distance between me: the observer, and the object. With no existing distance, things are not seen to be rational and objective, but to be experienced with senses, bodily presence of every moment and place. When perspective culture with its 'keeping a distance' results in flat, dehumanise, devalue other reality, and bias, inspective culture with its tools of taste, smell, touch, and see, brings

the deeper understanding of the thing we are researching. As Merleau-Ponty argues, "How can we know if we cannot see, touch, or smell the phenomenon?" His critic to perspective approach is that "we lose much of the substance of life-in-the-world by thinking operationally, by defining rather than experiencing the reality of things"

Since everything goes continuously in a dynamic way, there is no stability of thing - no single absolute truth; the truth is the change it self. In inspective culture, knowledge is constructed from the collective experience and discourse as a "shared world" that known by many people.

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Series of Lecture "Theory of Representative" by Professor Juha Varto, Spring term 2008, School of Art Education, University of Art and Design Helsinki.