

An Archive of Judgment and Experience:

Stray Thoughts on What is Needed but Not Found

1

To be a human is to hold certain feelings about everything in his or her life. It is possible that other life forms, too, can hold such feelings, but the complexity of the human feeling is special. The human feeling is not simply a passive perceptive phenomenon but a complex body of active judgments and experiences; it is a response that is subjective, a unifying body of knowledge, and human consciousness in its totality. In this regard, the human feeling is the symbol of its uniqueness in the universe. All human thoughts and ideas

start from here. It is the most human and unique operation of consciousness.

Art is the mirror reflection of the artist's life. The environment surrounding the artist, the different stages of life and the various phenomena the artist experiences are constantly impressed upon the artist's consciousness, and his or her art reflects these impressions. Based on what is thus impressed upon one's consciousness, one forms a special relationship between self and the world, in which one has to make judgments on one's experiences. Artists are subjects who have a strong desire to communicate this special relationship they have with the world and what they experience from it. One needs to look no further than contemporary art to see this. Many of the works address the problems of life and living. Their preoccupation concerns the artists' reality as

reflected upon their consciousness and their judgments regarding "problematic life."

In contrast to the artists' preoccupation with the problems of life, a different standard applied to evaluation of art. What has been important in the evaluation has been the artistic form, or the excellence or the supremacy of it, in terms of conveying the subject matter and the theme of the work.

Thus, while most artists address the problems or questions of life in their work, the truths that artists attempt to convey were not where art critics focused their attention; truth became the subject of secret consultation within the art world and among the public as the discussion of it disappeared as mysteriously as it appeared. Otherwise, truths that artists wished to convey were remembered only as an artistic trend. Looking at some of the historic art works that continue to exert influence, one realizes that they do provide

critical intelligence and a perspective on life and life's values; however, one also realizes that their intelligence, or their perspectives, have not been sequenced and accumulated in a systematic way to the point where they could serve as a universal wisdom that can be tapped into by a wider population of the world.

While making statements on life is like the Sisyphean labor, artists continue to make critical comments on life through their work. They speak about pains of life and the truths behind them; they pay their highest respects to human capacities for excellence, or they show their jealousy; they also speak about pains caused by taboos and barriers, confrontation between integrity and lies, ironies and depravity in life, and the fear of hunger and cruelty. That is why we still appreciate artistic endeavors as larger-than-life myths about human soul.

Western philosophy from the time of René Descartes to Jürgen Habermas is about judgment and decision. It is about analyzing experience to find social efficacy for reason, and about knowing the meaning of the totality of human experience.

In the old days, humans depended on preternatural powers for judgment of human experience. The transcendent and a priori consciousness dictated that judgment belonged to the divine sphere, and it was not to be tampered with by human faculty. However, although judgment was not something that could be speculated upon and understood by human, there were endless attempts to understand the truths of what humans experienced; such efforts were led by attempts to improve human capacity for judgment. The efforts to recognize, develop, and evaluate scientific methods to

classify human experience have been the driving force behind Western civilization.

In the preface of *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Immanuel Kant mentions the peculiar fate of human reason:

Human reason, in one sphere of its cognition, is called upon to consider questions, which it cannot decline, as they are presented by its own nature, but which it cannot answer, as they transcend every faculty of the mind. [1]

In other words, we are often faced with situations that have no answer and no conclusion. He then points out and explains, one by one, the special capacity of human reason for dealing with truth versus fabrication, identity versus difference, and agreement versus disagreement. Western thinkers thus came up with certain schema to identify the vast and bottomless world and the events that take place in it. In the visual field, they came up with perspective through

which they tried to reconstruct the entirety of object; in politics, parliamentary democracy was instituted to reproduce political will of the entire population. In their attributes, perspective and parliamentary democracy are isomorphic. They are the two sides of the same coin that is the modern "politics of expression," which addresses quality through quantity.

However, schematic representativeness in fact transforms itself into an apparatus of repression by its very nature. A representativeness bestowed upon from without does not leave a room for judging the true face of what is in fact experienced but not expressed.

By the time semiotics and linguistics arrived, the traditional view on experience and judgment changed in Western thinking. Semiotics treats language and object as a social contract, and life became, once again, unknowable. Words

and symbols are arbitrary signs, and they do not carry absolute values in and of themselves. By this time, people became skeptical of words about the world and things; they became skeptical about reality that was reduced to rhetoric. Neither could they be sure of the possibility of "common sense."

Semiotics and linguistics are fields of study that are not tectonic. The premise of their study is that every aspect of a phenomenon we witness is a trick. These are academic disciplines that are the result of the Western zeitgeist that began to recognize treachery (duplicity) as the true face of reality, which is the basic premise long held in Eastern philosophical traditions. Semiotics is full of abstruse terminology, and there are also theoretical differences within the field. Still, one can say that it is, as a whole, deconstructive in nature. It is the deconstruction of our

knowledge (the signified), and of the form that conveyed this knowledge to us (the signifier).

3

In the modern and contemporary practice of art criticism and art history, coherency of artist's experience and judgment are identified through the concept of artistic form or style. In the concept of form most widely circulated in Germany, 'form' signifies ontological reality; thus, the form here is not an accidental knowledge derived from the hybrid world; instead, it signifies what is in charge of and guarding meaningful experience and value judgment. Form is what would firmly establish the ontological truths of experience and judgment; it is the anchor whose standards are absolute around whose stake meaning could be hammered through.

Form signifies a new reality in which direct and indirect experiences —the simple, raw materials of consciousness —

are transformed into a new level of enlightenment through artistic genius and insight. The images of nature and history, of human and society, rendered in this new reality become the venue for fierce struggles for recognition by mythical figures.

In the Anglo-American world where the empiricist tradition is strong, form is more arbitrary. Here it is a perceptive form (Gestalt in German). In France, form was considered the "structure of image." Following Heinrich Wölflin's concept of "artistic vision," Erwin Panofsky, Rudolf Arnheim, and E.H. Gombrich defined "beauty of form" as the protagonist (central signifier) of semantics, or as the image symbolizing the value standards of Western humanities.

In the world where God no longer existed and only humans existed by themselves, meaning still had to exist; there had to be a self-contained and autonomous system of meaning,

one that could explain why meaning operated. Humans had to rely on the value they created to perform this function. Art history visually answers historical demands made by modern and contemporary human civilization.

The corresponding concepts of artistic form in political science, history, and sociology are the concepts of "structure," "ideology," and "zeitgeist" and "culture." Without virtual reality, or without a conceptual medium for social formation, humanity cannot activate social epistemology and ontology.

"[C]alled upon to consider questions, which it cannot decline, as they are presented by its own nature, but which it cannot answer, as they transcend every faculty of the mind,"[2] a work of art generates "meaning" through strict methods of observation and a creative vision. To interpret the meaning generated by works of art, certain conceptual formula have

been suggested. They provide background information on how meaning is gained; in other words, they provide information on the era, the personal experience of the artist, how certain experience and events gain personal and social meaning, and the possible intentions behind the works.

Ultimately, meaning is the goal intended by an act. The meaning of the meaning is identified as the product of desire. In this way, 'meaning,' and the value attached to it, come to be recognized as a subjective matter for individual perception. At the same time, the notions of 'image' and 'form' are replaced by the notion of 'sign.'

Having denied the existence of transcendent and a priori being, humans have almost adopted semiotic concepts as sacred stewards of value. These concepts became the sign posts for understanding human experience and making judgments, as they became superior criteria for object and

action evaluations. So as to not fall into the bottomless abyss of hell, a self-centered and autonomous system is needed that could very well be existing in the state of vacuum.

4

Eugenics, although unfamiliar to many people, was the "hidden god" and the basic premise for value evaluation and for making personal and social decisions throughout human civilization. Eugenics is the field of study that focuses on selecting and improving genetic characters thought to be superior and to eliminate those that are considered undesirable. Eugenics speaks for the bio-philosophy of society in which its vitality is augmented through the labor of killing what is considered inferior in quality. Inferiority is a quality that certain social groups consider worthless, a quality that has a different value standard. In other words, it is the Other. Thus, this is the starting point of the truth

game; a game of judging what is superior and inferior, or desirable and undesirable.

'Quality' originally referred to the different qualities innate in all individuals. However, it came to refer to what is considered superior in the value hierarchy of quality, and it became synonymous with "dominant character," or what is considered desirable. Thus, "improvement" in terms of living, came to mean improvements as desired by the elite in society, or those who are believed to possess the superior character according to the standards of eugenics commonly shared in society. In order to possess a higher level of 'quality' (use value) desired by the commanders of the semantics, or those who have the ruling hegemony, investment in more 'quantity' (exchange value) became necessary.

Originally 'quality' referred to qualities that are unique but equal among individuals. Equality means equality of individual qualities, but in reality, individual qualities are thoroughly classified into class categories. Quality of experience and judgment also became classified into class categories. Education became a means to experience and learn the standards of eugenics.

However, what does "superior" mean? The ancient Silk Road certainly carried more than just silk, perfume, and other precious commodities. However, it was a road paved by desire for superior goods, or goods that were empirically considered precious and judged to be necessary. The civilizations and cultures created by "superior" people and goods gave rise to the human desire to imitate and to rule. Superiority became the history of many heroes, both minor and major, and "improvement of productivity" became the

desire of the elite who received eugenics education. In socialist countries, too, class consciousness existed; here the issue was the selection or castration of superior socialist genes. Let us suppose for a moment that one became "superior," because one had to be superior to survive, whatever the system, and because experience and judgment are required for survival. Let us also suppose that he/she eliminates and destroys what is not desirable for him/her. Would this mean that from the long- and short-term perspective of humanity it is a good choice?

5

Art history in fact tells us about the different choices that were made, or the choices that do not rely on the premise of eugenics. Leading narratives of human civilizations convey a variety of stories on this topic. In both the West and the East, great narratives tell epic stories, and confrontation with those

in power. Ultimately, these are narratives that seek clues for judgment on a variety of complex issues that arise out of life.

As György Lukács analyzed in *The Theory of the Novel* (1915), a literary narrative conveys human experience in its totality and lets the reader make judgment; in this way it raises questions about the hidden meaning of the "event." This is true of a large gamut of works that include *Jhangar*, the Mongolian epic poetry; *Bhagavadgītā* of India; "The History of Reynar the Fox"; *Saga*, the ancient Icelandic epic poetry; Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*; the *Carmina Burana*; *Chroniques* by Jean Froissart; *On Contempt for the World* by Girolamo Savonarola and *The Life of Thomas Wolsey* by George Cavendish; *The Arabian Nights*; *The Divine Comedy* by Dante; the *Books of Fables* by François Rabelais and *Don Quixote* by Cervantes; the romantic and idealistic poetry of S.T. Coleridge and William Blake; the *Rougon-Macquart* series

of novels by Émile Zola; and the series of La Comédie Humaine by Honoré de Balzac. The fact that Zola, an anarcho-communist and the founder of the legendary French magazine La Feuille, saw "propaganda of the deed as akin to works of art" is in the same spirit. Works by William Hogarth, Francisco Goya, J. J. Granville, Honoré Daumier, and Vincent Van Gogh and his anarchist and anti-capitalist contemporaries such as Camille Pissarro and Paul Signac also belong to this category.

Their works were the precursor to today's cultural studies. The practitioners of today's cultural studies have left the world deconstructed by post-modern discourses; and whether by their own internal logic or by external force, they work outside of the system to formulate discourses on meaning. Their task is to utilize a global perspective on experience and judgment and to draw a multicultural and

holistic picture of the unity of knowledge ("consilience") and life. From the perspective of the earlier artists who explored ideas about life and truth not included in traditional representational system, it can be said that their critical thinking and approach were a correlate to today's cultural studies.

From outside of the boundary, powers within the boundary are virtual powers; for example, they are powers that are operated by the force of capital and institutions. However, when stakes for eugenics change, the balance of these powers also change. From the inside, though, it is difficult to identify the powers in operation in much the same way that the authorities are mysterious in *The Castle* by Franz Kafka.

Today, progressive art is not completely free from the traditional framework of practicing art. That is to say, they still produce art within the conceptual framework of art

institution. However, their goal is to raise questions about the experiences comparable to those described in *The Castle* and to raise questions about judgment made about such experience. To artists, recognition of and judgment on experienced events are becoming increasingly more important. This manner of raising questions has long been the creative task and impetus for contemporary art.

On the other hand, why is it that artists' utterances and actions are circulated within the art world only, and that their works are mentioned in the media only to be soon forgotten, like the other events reported in newspapers? Or, perhaps are works preserved in museum archives, their eugenic pedigree firmly secured in the hierarchy artistic value. What about the art works not collected by art museums? They would disappear like the countless waves that break into bubbles on a seashore. What the artists want to

communicate about the universe and death are swallowed in less than a moment's time. For some time now, this thought has occurred to me when I see an art show or an art work.

It would not be an overstatement to say that art has deepened and broadened human vision and understanding.

Countless artists have tried to see reality as is, and they observed and recorded its every aspect. Renowned and anonymous artists alike have interpreted and represented reality through their works. Every community in the world has its own art history, and there are full-time artists in almost every city in modern societies. Reality conveyed in these works is truly kaleidoscopic in their diversity of forms and contents.

Literature, film, and theatre also have history. The fields of documentary productions, animation, and illustration are full

of stories about human experience. Artists interpret the world and analyze reality, and social criticisms abound.

The events in the lived experience of humanity run the gamut from the tragic to comic, from the joyful to the preposterous. In the *Logic of Sense*, Gilles Deleuze calls an event a "singularity" that opens a new level of meaning. In this regard, artists are people who try to bring out the singularity of event.

Artists today no longer believe in the premise of "fine art."

They simply consider art as a social venue and a rule in which it is possible for them to use free, individual, and special language. Art is a mode through which they wish to reveal the reality of the singularity of an event. However, despite the countless social realities that they exposed, why is it that we do not yet have a comprehensive image of reality, of our experience?

To many Koreans, Western art history and the many stories behind it are well known, but our stories are still largely unfamiliar in the West. By the same token, Chinese and Japanese art history, as well as art history of the Near Eastern and Middle Eastern countries is hardly known in Korea despite the geographical proximity of those countries. If their experience and our experience, as reflected in the art works of respective countries, can it be tapped into simultaneously, could it not change the way we see our own history as well as the history of the others and the human universality in them? Could it change how we judge and understand the experience of humanity as a whole?

Alfred Hitchcock once said in an interview that "Every little town had shared of evil."^[3] Thus every community has its own standard of good and evil. A singular experience in any

given society is called an "event." Judgments on such experience can be seen in piles of court and police documents, and one does not need help from art in this regard.

Given that this is the case, can we not bring together court decisions, police documents, artists' stories, autobiographies, critical biographies, and diaries from different countries?

Group them according to event types and how they have been interpreted? Is there not a need to examine the points of limitation and possibility common in all of them? Can this be done by archiving artistic themes, experience, and events of the world? Can there not be an archive with such a goal?

And, if such an archive were established, is it possible not to repeat the eugenics of experience but to realize the practice of reflective judgment toward the goal of achieving social equality? Will social and policy institutions make decisions

with at least the minimum capacity for self-examination? In other words, given that we live in a world where there is no universal truth, no direction for action that is best for all people, can we try to be comprehensive and embrace the particular (a singular event, an individual action, an act of sin, and what is inferior) from the direction of the universal good? What kind of judgment capacity do we need for this to happen? What are the particularities of the human difficulty faced by societies and individual lives on earth? Is there a possibility for mediating such particularities as the universal need and for nurturing judgment capacity for it? And, if we can achieve all of these, would it still be possible to achieve democracy in its full quality? In other words, will we then have a political system in which every individual has an opportunity to fully realize his or her unique quality, where the particular becomes the norm?

If such a world was even remotely possible, should it not behoove artists to connect globally and to mediate each others' statement in order to secure new universality for public interest, or what I would call the truth value carried out by reflective judgment capacity? If it were at all possible to achieve new universalism through such efforts, then a new universalism that can overcome Deconstructionism would be possible. It would be the kind of universalism that Kant also refers to in Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point View, which is the kind of universalism that is faithful to experience about and by humanity.

It should be noted, also, that an archive with such an aim and structure cannot by itself accomplish this goal of universalism. Unity of global art historical knowledge and the interdisciplinary studies accommodating it would not be

enough to fully realize the democratic universal desire of the world's humanity.

And the academics? Scholars have been talking about consilience and interdisciplinary scholarship. However, looking at the situation in Korea only, either the "consilience" theory itself has become a separate academic discipline, or its practice has remained at an otherwise superficial level.

7

I gave the example of an art archive above. It was meant to be just an example. What I wish to convey here is that we have to somehow be able to tap into the arduous reflections made by people in different parts of the world, that is to say, the knowledge and experience of various people on earth have to be properly built upon, whether by establishing an archive or by some other means or methods. Towards

meeting this goal, artists and scholars must try to raise the quality of judgment about people.

A prerequisite for achieving proper unity of knowledge is that academics must accept works of art as an outcome of research on humanity. Consilience does not simply mean unity of separate branches of academia but unity of all traditional disciplines of learning in the world. It means unity of knowledge both within and between disciplines; global historical unity of modern and contemporary knowledge among all nations in the world; and unity of knowledge that also includes court rulings from various nations. The understanding on human experience and judgment developed by various communities in the world through their separate practices of scholarship must be identified at the level of a system of artistic and social discourse.

As mentioned earlier, Western scholarship and art have been about studying experience and judgment. However, the results of their study did not become interlinked together, and they failed to deliver a whole picture of life. In Korea, too, among the scholars who are trained in the Anglo-American school of thought, where the tradition of pragmatism is strong, the concept of "experience" is used to emphasize the importance of positivism for efficiency. Those trained in the Continental school are more likely to address concepts of "reflection" and "judgment" as they discuss the superiority and loftiness of philosophy.

For Koreans, 'experience' and 'judgment' are two separate terminologies, each coming from a different academic discipline. Thus Korean scholarship fails to address issues of human life in real-life time and space. Furthermore, learning systems in North and South Korea are so different that it is

not even possible to share a common sense of Korean history as one nation. The only common understanding between the two sides is the belief in the excellence of Korean national character.

As mentioned at the beginning of this essay, artistic efforts have long been seen as a Sisyphean struggle. I came up with what could possibly be only an imagination in my search for the ways of addressing this issue. In the process, I came to a conclusion that there is a need, and a possibility, for unity of knowledge among artists and scholars.

Arts and sciences are perhaps the only hope for humanity.

What we need to save humanity are not the national, ethnic, political, and economic interests that we have today. Instead, if there is to be a hope, even a flickering of it, we need a global framework of public discussion that would enable us to share experience of various nations and communities in

the world and to operate a frame work of judgment fit for such a scale. Such a global framework should be able to mediate different academic disciplines, the academia, the art world, and the art world and the particular experience of individuals, so that we can recognize at least in part all that is "qualitative," and all that is problematic, from a holistic point of view. If such a situation were to be realized, perhaps the true nature of the work of art would shine through and people would listen to what artists have to say in the same manner that they listen to sacred texts of various religions. In other words, I hope such a project can be safeguarded as a divine move and be remembered as a beautiful vision that can improve the lot of humanity in this world.

[1] Kant, Immanuel. Trans. J.M.D. Meiklejohn. "Preface to the first edition, 1781." *The Critique of Pure Reason* (2013): 3. A

Penn State Electronic Classics Series Publication, 14 Apr. 2010.

Web. 14 Jul. 2013.

<<http://www2.hn.psu.edu/faculty/jmanis/kant/critique-pure-reason6x9.pdf>>

[2] Ibid.

[3] The Men Who Made the Movies : Hitchcock. Dir. Richard Schickel. Perf. Alfred Hitchcock, Cliff Robertson. The American Cinematheque, 1973. Television movie.

(Translated from Korean by Kyung-hi Rhee)