

Viewpoint as Existential Ruminations

Kang Sojung

Perhaps, the one with genuinely bright eyesight could be a blind person. When Borges became blind in his late years, his thoughts rather deepened and his imagination

grew ample, so that he could indicate the invisible world and nothingness, or the world as blankness which was adjusted to be invisible, for us to see, for us the blind with eyes open. It is the same logic as when you need to turn off the light called reason which lights up the indoors of your house, in order to see new lights that shed on the indoors and outdoors of the house. Despite the fact that you are very familiar with this logic, it is not at all easy to turn off this light of reason. But the artist Park Sunmin who does quite a bit of storytelling on the theme of 'viewing', seems to have given an attempt to turn off such light via her solo exhibition <Highway Geometry>. This impression is due to the encounter with the blind fish that first welcome the viewers who enter the venue. From the blind fish that swim while following around the light which is delicately emitted from behind, and multiview display and conflict shown by using lens in a mix of structure and collage work, to the video work emphasizing the camera's eye, the artist whispers in secret, urging us to talk about what we view in our daily lives and at the same time, about what we cannot see anymore.

Park Sunmin regards highly of observation and puts forth 'the act of viewing' and transforms it into language of her own. She confers meaning upon 'viewing' and plays variations of her unique visual epistemology. Her perspective is not set toward the inner artistic world of herself, but toward the expansive action of viewing the daily routine and landscape of the object's world. One could wonder what the big deal is, since visual art is based on viewing anyway, but the

rumination on viewpoint attempted by Park is unique. We must have in mind that for the artist, 'viewing' and selecting a 'manner of viewing' signify existential gaze, contrary to the observed, reproduced and controlled viewpoint.

First of all, what is 'viewing'? Looking as a perceived act is attached to the perceptive reaction of the subject and expresses the will of the subject who understands and ponders on the world. Generally, the perspective of the subject viewing the object in an art work is an act of viewing which consists of condensing and integrating all things in the structure of totality and unity, by the modern rational subject. To the contrary, the act of viewing attempted by Park Sunmin is an invitation to fragmented visual space where multi-viewpoint, opaque perspective, even invisible or unseeable state which should be seeable are the major actors. These variations question where our existential standpoint is, and where we should be heading. Daily life established in perfect and impeccable order, and numerous paths that we learn as the right path, actually coexist with various unclear variables which cannot be discerned. And there are many cases where the firm paths that one had followed without any resistance were interpreted arbitrarily and one realizes that they were merely given paths accompanied with violence. For this reason, 'viewing' according to Park Sunmin is not about the daily attitude of contemplation, but existential rumination. Through her gaze, the viewpoint of the subject transcends existential time and creates the new horizon while crossing over daily space. For example, the piece <Highway Geometry 1> is a collage-photographic work which displays connected images of electric wires that randomly criss-cross over the urban sky. The multiview images shown by nonlinear display guide us to see the expansion of time and space expressed by the wire layers and to feel a strange aesthetic satisfaction, instead of feeling the usual discomfort provided by the urban wire images.

This viewpoint as existential rumination is unique in the sense that it is not issued from the context of trying to find a new viewpoint from outside as binary opposition, but proposes a viewpoint as a 'gap' which was always there in your daily life but was forgotten and invisible. However, this should be clearly distinguished from the complacent attitude of 'viewing the object from a different view and context' already shown by many other contemporary artists. Her gaze consists of the viewpoint of the minority, as a certain 'gap' or of a phantom. It puts forth the world of the object, mainly certain object or image from daily life, attached to the gap found inside the daily routine, not from the outside, while shaking up the whole world from inside such daily scenes. That is, the artist's gaze boldly attacks the premise that we can visualize everything, and brings about new visual reasoning from the point where everything looks perfect. It is similar to the process of Badiou interpreting from Paul Celan's poem that the thoughts of our era do not originate from the seizure of the whole, in the thinking process of the 'inesthétique.' According to Badiou, since a certain unified whole and its name are not plausible anymore, we should find some other fixed point than the unity of whole. Thus, Badiou reads the possibility of this 'otherness' from Celan's poem. The fact that we cannot think about the unified whole does not mean everything disappears. It merely means that we reside no longer in the fiction of 'whole.' At the vantage point where the whole reveals that it is nothing, we may find the new possibility. As in Celan's poem, the viewpoint of Park Sunmin focuses on this very minute crack in the whole and recomposes it aesthetically. We can see such examples in her video work <Highway Geometry 2>, of the fragmented images that pop up randomly in the midst of the race on a highway which endlessly creates triangular images which symbolize totality or perfection. They pop up at an instant while fatally damaging all the blind and unconscious belief that one thought to be perfect. In another of

her video work <Nearsighted Jungle>, one can observe similar attitude and gaze of the artist, where she has embraced images of urban forest and its dwellers under the title of Jungle. To make the city invisible, the distance between the subject and the camera had to be narrowed and as a result, the city forest was depicted as a jungle. Cracks of totality could be found here and there from their early phase, and as we followed around the viewpoints proposed by the artist, we discover ourselves experiencing the existential viewpoint by focusing on the 'gap' in our daily lives that we thought as being perfect.

Perhaps the reason why Park Sunmin's unique existential viewpoint has gained certain power and resonance is that the artist has shown constant interest on the daily banalities that could be very trivial. Her delicate descriptive style played in variations under the theme of dailiness is one of her characteristics, that stood out in her prior collaborative works with artist Choi Sung-hun. Park's gaze on the daily routine is the perspective of the subtle observer who would be interested in the minute daily cracks and the unstable voice of the indiscernible 'gap,' rather than that of the cold-hearted observer who would fixate all landscapes. It does not reveal the peak of the exhaustive emotion, nor does it forget the goal of capturing without any exaggeration, the hidden side of the daily routine taxidermied by such gaze. It is meaningful since the gaze attempts to lure unfamiliar images which we have never imagined, and shake off the order and dislocate them. The endless repetition of edited short clips in <Highway Geometry 2> and extreme close-ups and the delicate deep-focus description enhancing the sense of rupture and suffocation in <Nearsighted Jungle> are pertinent expressions selected to reveal such perspective. It was effective in expressing modern routine that is accompanied by repetition, speed, and stuffiness. Liberal and balanced viewpoint which is not affected by emotion, frank observation and gaze on existential routine are expressed using adequate media which are well

displayed, so the viewers tend to stay longer facing the question thrown by the artist.

While pondering on these questions on the way out, one faces again the blind fish. Against a backdrop of the video piece of the sun and the moon shaking their round body as if dancing away some steps inside a small structure which looks like a theater, the blind fish create new movement by following the light in <Waltz>. We don't know how on earth it is possible, but these blind beings must sense the light through some unknown ability, like Borges discovers something more when he is left in his solitary darkness. When I was contemplating on their way of sensing the light, I was suddenly reminded. Of the fact that the nickname of Borges was also, blind fish.