

Peter Traylor
Kishiwada Story
IP Thesis

What if I said that being a foreigner gave me insights into another country's society that those within the society are unaware of.

Am I being pretentious when I say I can see problems in someone else's life that are otherwise invisible to those who exhibit them? An outside perspective will reveal those elements of a system that are lost to those who have come to expect these nuances as a fact of daily life. Such nuances call forth the entire gamut of reactions from the foreigner, who is experiencing the system for the first time.

Those within this system may accept such elements as unremarkable, but the outsider will notice the details and that which was previously unremarkable becomes remarkable with these fresh eyes.

For example, a city's populace might have grown accustomed to the architecture that surrounds them, yet when an outsider beholds the unique aesthetic for the first time, they might find themselves inspired. A positive reaction is only one possible emotion of countless others.

What if instead of delightful architecture, the outsider beheld atrocities against humanity, that had merely been consumed by the workings of society. The reaction by this person would undoubtedly be extremely negative, possibly causing the outsider to take action against this problem in an effort to change this society into what they perceive as better.

Is this action justified? Does the outsider have any right in attempting to right they believe is a wrong in some other society? Or are they just pretentious?

During the summer of 2007, I lived a fairly integrated life within the city of Osaka, Japan. I worked a day job and paid rent, just like any other resident of the city. I walked the same street and travelled on the same trains as if I were no different from anybody else. What was different, though, was my perception of this daily life. There were nuances of this life that called my attention like a blaring siren. I wondered how the Japanese people could grow accustomed to these alarms.

"It's so annoying," would be the best reaction that I could get out of my Osaka girlfriend. "I hate the Hanwa line!" The Hanwa line she was referring to is the local train line she relies on to commute into Osaka City. Her anger was in response to the train delay.

Delays are a common occurrence on the Hanwa line. If you asked her for a reason for the delay, she would tell you it was "just another accident."

The term "accident" can actually hold a variety of different definitions. Sometimes the train does in fact malfunction and cause a delay, however, at least once or twice a

month “another accident” really means someone committed suicide by jumping off the platform into an approaching express train.

The event maybe shocking to those who witness the display, but for all others, its an annoyance caused by some selfish person who apparently does not care they they are going to delay all the trains on that line for about and hour.

Myself on the other hand, was rather disturbed by both the action and reaction. The suicide only matters to my girlfriend because she was going to be late for school. The horror of this suicide is compounded by the fact that this is a common occurrence. The frequency of suicides is so high that the Japanese people accept it as normal.

If I am so horrified by something I think is wrong, should I attempt to do something about it? How would I go about informing a group of people that something within their society is incorrect?

These are some of the questions that I am attempting to explore in my work.

Japanese society itself, as I am sure is similar to most countries, offers a number of layers within society that can be experienced should the foreigner choose to dig deep enough.

The most surface level is frequented by the tourists who come for the temples and anime. Language is often an insurmountable barrier. Large quantities of hybrid english and Japanese signs come as a great aid within the highly touristy areas. To them, Japan is a wonderland of cute things and neat traditions, and it doesn't get much deeper.

The next level down is for students who study abroad and the others who are remaining for a prolonged period of a few months. These people tend to have an interest in the deeper aspects of Japanese culture as well as some desire to speak a bit of the language. Japan will begin to peel back some of its layers, allowing these foreigners to actually communicate with some of the locals. This grants access to intermingling and allows the foreigner to get involved in some of the more usual parts of life, such as going to out and meeting with friends.

The next layer down is a direct descendant of the prior, in that once the foreigner feels comfortable within society, they can get a job and a place to live. It is also at this layer when a foreigner begins to notice the oddities of Japanese society.

The junction between these last two layers is where I want my work to exist. It is where the foreigner has rough gasp on how society functions, yet often makes minor social blunders. Here the foreigner can decide whether to take their relationship with Japan deeper or just stay in happy surface deep land.

If I were to project, what works for me, onto the rest of humanity, I would claim that the best way to learn about something is to interact with it. Therefore it would follow that the best way to explore my questions would be to interact with them. If I wanted somebody to encounter my questions in a meaningful way, and then somehow form an opinion, it would be best if they could somehow experience the same situation.

If I could create an interactive experience that makes visible some of the issues that I struggled with in Japan, would that cause people to at least give some thought to them?

With any art piece, if you want to get your point across to the viewer, they must be engaged in your work. This fundamental problem is compounded with interactive works, because there is an added layer of complexity on top of the initial appearance of the work. The interaction should be relevant most importantly, understandable.

A lesson learned early during my project's development illustrates that it is nearly impossible for the viewer to engage in an interactive work if the commands they input give unexpected and confusing results. The player feels rejected from the work and has little desire to continue the experience.

(needs connection?)

The aesthetic of my work, references the style of video games created for home video game consoles of the mid '90s, specifically the 16 bit era machines; Super Nintendo, Sega Genesis and Turbo Grafx 16.

For those who are familiar with these consoles, there is an immediate understanding and hopefully an interest in my own work as it appears to be already familiar. The 2 dimensional and basic nature of the graphics also help those who are not familiar with this type of experience to not be overwhelmed with visual stimuli. The scenes, within my work, are themselves broken up into smaller and easier to comprehend parts. These considerations will minimize an initial, visual barrier.

Japan is the subject of my work and my personal knowledge is of Osaka. The world that I am creating will echo my own experiences while living in studying in Japan. The characters populating the world will all be based off of people I met there. The problems that are also present will be based off similar problems of my own.

A challenge to design will be balancing how authentic the world is to actual Osaka Japan. The answer is to fool the viewer into thinking they are fully immersed in Japanese society, while helping the player to progress by giving recognizable hints.

The viewer will interact with the work through an on screen avatar. The avatar takes the form of a foreigner named Ian. By controlling Ian, the viewer will be able to explore the world I have created, and interact with various characters.

Ian however will acquire a special ability that allows him to interact with the characters in his world on a deeper level than merely communication. Ian will be able to see what the characters are thinking. This gives the player the potential to gain a much deeper understanding of the character's personalities.

Utilizing this special ability will be vital to progression. For example: it maybe that the player will encounter a puzzle with the solution not being immediately visible. The solution however is known by another character and the player must read their thoughts to discover the solution.

The feedback given by these characters will craft a narrative the player will be able to experience in a personal way. This narrative will be my avenue for illustrating some of the primary issues I encountered while living in Japan.

The player will have the opportunity to experience some of my own dilemmas and develop their own responses to these problems.