

BEING-IN-THE WORLD ACCORDING TO DOYOK: A Study of humor in cartoon comics

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"Being-in-the-world" remind us of existential philosophies which have their methodological foundation in phenomenology. In this case, the material taken for phenomenological study is the extremely popular comic-cartoon in the Jakarta daily newspaper POSKOTA, read by workers in the informal sector, the majority of simple people with small incomes and no labour - protection, probably with some elementary school education. The hero named DOYOK appears in a series of 6 pictures.

The cartoon-comics is a combination of humorous drawing-cartoon as a from of social comment presented as a series of pictures-comics with caricatural content, implying some measure of distortion. 114 cartoon-comics between 31/12/1988 and 27/11/1989 are chosen which were listed according to the elements constituting the humor of this cartoons following the theory proposed by A. Koestler (*Act of Creation*, Picador, 1978).

The purpose of this study is: (1) to find corroboration for Koestler's theory of humor as a form of creativity (background theory of Aristoteles & Bergson), (2) to acquire a description of DOYOK-in-his-WORLD, which is an effort to understand the world of "the man in the street".

The description will expose his critical view on his world, subdued but still critical, condescendingly tolerated in a society with national aspiration to over-all harmony and consensus.

Theory and Methodology

The theory of humor starts as early as Aristoteles, continued through Bergson till A. Koestler in his theory of creativity. Humor (in Latin referring to the fluids of the body) is an art, and as such includes the aspect of *mimesis* or imitation. In his theory of literature (Poetics) we will find the following:

"In the first book we dealt with tragedy and saw how, by arousing pity and fear, it produces catharsis, the purification of that passion. That such passion is most worthy of consideration we have already said in the book of the soul, in as such as --alone among animals-- *man is capable of laughter*. We will define the type of action of which comedy is the *mimesis*, then we will examine the means by which comedy excites laughter, and these means are actions and speech, we will show how the ridiculousness of actions is born from the likening of the best to the worst and vice versa, from arousing surprise through deceit ..." (Eco, 1984: 569)

According to Bergson:

"Laughter is a reflex or automatic reaction, seemingly without a biological function, as 'an overstatement of the body'. It is spontaneous and biologically spoken a luxury, transcending the body, the emotions, the thought and voluntary action".

Koestler's theory explains laughter as tension to be solved in catharsis, while the tension is caused by two conflicting associations. Koestler used the term bisociatic contradictions, or contradictory matrices. "The perceiving of a situation or idea in two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference" (Koestler, 1975: 35).

On the other hand, laughter is seen a "momentary anaesthesia of the heart", referring to the emotive content of the cause of laughter. The presupposed psychological distance could reveal aggression or apprehension, both powerful emotions to find their catharsis in laughter. "I shall use the word matrix to denote any ability, habit, or skill, any pattern of ordered behaviour governed by a code of fixed rules". (Koestler, 1975: 38)

The method used is the approach of acquiring a description of the phenomenon in consciousness, in this case the consciousness of the researcher, as a response on the creative efforts derived from the cartoonist, tracing his own response.

In the literature of phenomenology "Imaginative Variation" and "Wesensschau" are the exercises used to trace the essence of the

specific wit, found in each cartoon. The cartoons are listed in several columns according to:

- 1) the theme or subject matter
- 2) the contradicting matrices or paradigms
- 3) apprehension or aggression
- 4) the focus of aggression

After these qualitative steps, the measure of frequency and variations will support the conclusions drawn from the total sample of 114 drawings.

Findings and discussion

The following cartoon-comics consists of 6 pictures depicting Doyok's story. The stories has a hero (Doyok), a plot involving some other people or events, and a humorous climax, usually in succession of six pictures. The balloons are containing the text which is a careful exposition leading to the climax. Carefully so, because of its instructive aspects, to be read by simple people who need step-by-step approach to acquire insight in the subject-matter which is quite instructive on the workings of society, reading and digesting the cartoon and to bring them to the climax of laughter.

Koestler's theory with some modifications, could be elaborated according to a diagram of the elements involved in humor and laughter:

BODY: OVERSTATEMENT	M I N D		
	Thought	Emotion	Volition Voluntary Action
	Contradiction	Catharsis of apprehension & aggression	Sublimated spontaneous



The cartoon-comics are "analyzed" through the instrument of the reader's response to find the five elements listed in the methodological steps.

No	DATES	THEME	METRIX	AIM OF APREHENSIONS	AIM OF COMPONENTS
1.	30-12-1987	NEW YEAR'S	At new year's eve, happy with dates versus oing to the " rain maker	a miserable new year's eve	Doyok who is jealous Doyok's friends who don't want to spend new years's with Doyok
2.	2-1-1988	Prediction : The economy will be strong	The difficult economy versus the operation of cutting the intestines against hunger	the difficult economy	Doyok who is affraid of hunger, doctor at the hospital
3.	13-1-1988	Increase of petrol price	An uncertain happiness versus Doyok's silly promise	rises of petrol price	Doyok's silly promise.
4.	14-1-1988	Government's employees income	The idea of making a prosperous life, for the government's employees through tuyul, Nyi Blorong	Government's employees income that hasn't been raised but the price has gone up	Doyok who believes in mistics and supertions

5.	15-1-1988	SOB	" SOB buntut " Rp. 5000,- versus sports contribution (lottery)	SOB / SSB as a lottery	bad luck
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A careful and thorough listing of the content- variation along the length of the columns of 114 drawings provided the following points of interest.

- 1) It is not always easy to find contradictory matrixes in each drawing. Less witty means less pronounced contradiction.
- 2) However, a very pronounced contradiction concerning more deeper issues will cause more apprehension than laughter. It is therefore relevant to distinguish between periphery and deep contradiction.
- 3) Peripheral contradiction exists laughter, deep contradiction points to tragedy.
- 4) Apprehension is directed to the problem in society and are such problem-oriented.
- 5) Agression is directed to anonymous persons, from a position of non-importance and insignificance.
- 6) Finally agression is directed to Doyok himself, as a personification of "traditional Javanese backward mentality", not being able to cope with contemporary problems.

Koestler's theory has been an instrument to illuminate the intricate structure and components of cartoon-comics. Humor as a form of creativity, presupposes the freedom to perceive contradicting matrices, the courage to perceive existing tension and problems.

The outcome of study is a description of Doyok and his world, to acquire an integrated "gestalt" through the rich nuances of Doyoks responses.

Profile of Doyok

Doyok is an Indonesian, belonging to Javanese- ethnic, which is evident through his attire. He wears the traditional Javanese clothes which is conspicuous through the "blangkon", a headdress of very finely pleated batik cloth, a kind of turban, the usual pleated skirt of batik cloth, a sorjan, a shirt highly buttoned made of lurik (striped cotton) which on the whole makes him the formal, restricted, appropriate attire for polite people, with very introspective, contemplative and self controlled behaviour. But in Doyok's case he is wearing trousers instead of a pleated skirt which add to the incongruence of his whole appearance. His face is insignificant except for the pronounced front teeth. He considers himself ugly and indeed insignificant.

He dreams of a fulfilled life, not to worry about daily food, a good job in spite of his lack of skills and education. Food is his primary concern,

next to his frustration that he will never find a girl, because women have their expectations which he will never live up to. They expect him to - accompany them for a shopping spree around the department stores. He buys the girl a jean-skirt paying it with small change, causing her embarrassment. He buys her martabak (a kind of pizza) and expects a kiss of gratitude in return. When he is lucky maybe he'll find a rich widow but he is always out of favour with all prospective inlaws. At least, he still aspires an all Indonesian girl, in accordance with the appeal made by the government to the public at large, to appreciate domestic products instead of foreign imported goods.

For Doyok, a content life means no hunger, and a women, in this order of priority. Not to worry about increasing prices of rices, fuel (because if it does it effects other prices), paying no tax, being properly employed, being connected by phone (although totally beyond his means), if possible to have a deposit with high interest rate and hopefully not to be cheated by others. He sometimes dreams of winning a national lottery, or why not take a minor part in a movie just to be close to the glitter of the movie-world. The dreams of possessing a second hand car and being able to drive through expensive toll roads. Recreation on Sundays, and having a date on new year's eve. Not threatened by flood in the rainy season and not forced to move from his home because land is needed for development-projects while never properly compensated.

In spite of his dreams, the facts of his life are poverty, increasing prices with low government official salary, a non-used kitchen (he buys his food at food stalls and street vendors), epidemic of mosquitoes. And in spite of his computer courses he is official statements announce Indonesia's promising prospects, he wonders whose prospects are they referring to. Corruption seems to him a strange disease but it couldn't of course be cured by jamu godogan (a traditional herbal drink against minor ailments).

How to pay his debts for his meals at the street foodstalls is his question. When he employed it turns out that there is no safety in his working place. His command of English is very poor. Low teachers' salary are still reduced by all kinds of compulsory contributions. And when he is unemployed, he is left by his sweetheart, he then wonders whether suicide will be the only solution. Or may be by chance parts of the cosmos satellite will fall from the sky and destroy him. The efforts made to overcome the situations are hiding in sewers, safe from falling satellite fragments. Fighting mosquitoes with a golok (a big knife used to cut open coconuts). When women take their recourse to plastic surgery, Doyok believes in intestinal operation against hunger, in buying SOB and SDSB lotteries, in taking computer and English courses, in making courtesy visits to his boss, in giving ... money to the tax-official to keep them quiet. When injustice is evident, he knows when to keep quiet for example,

when acquiring membership of foundations which later embezzle the entrusted funds.

He is tempted to put his savings in deposits which are advertising high interests. He wonders whether it would be possible to earn money by singing around with a guitar at public places, but there are so many of them already ... or even to become a becak driver with its hazards in traffic accidents but is now out of question. He deeply believes that his misfortune might be his destiny. Some mystical means to change his fortune might be still possible : to maintain a "tuyul ", to make an obscure contract with "nyi Blorong" selling your soul to acquire material goods and riches, which of course, is much more serious than going to the "rain maker" who can prevent rain on New Year's or other special occasions. How fortunate that the low government official salaries are now paid through bank accounts, at least it saves his dignity not to queue to get his money. Moreover, the most proper and dignified way to respond to misfortune is resignation.

The world of Doyok is depicted as a world where the nation's economy is a serious problem : prices of rice and gasoline are soaring, even the daily needs are difficult to meet. Low government salaries, epidemics, unemployment, traditions and superstitions are impediments for development, the solution for the economy is tourism and non-oil exports.

Short term courses and private universities are short-cuts to acquire a privileged people who are able to go shopping and drive their cars. Who are those privileged people who practice corruption without any shame? Who do not have to pay for immediaries because of their high ranks in bureaucracy? Those people from Jakarta who are buying land in west-Irian for their investments and projects? Parliament members, representatives of the people who are buying Rp 700-million houses? The simple trusting people are cheated by foundations and other unfamiliar institutions, its mechanism and bureaucracy is becoming increasingly incomprehensible except for professional people. Even the language is increasingly incomprehensible by euphemisms, acronyms, and neologism.

The attraction to foreign made products have to be substituted by the appeal of domestic products, which will enhance national industries. But the young people now have acquired a modern sophisticated taste, a glamorous world of jet-set consumerism which is in contrast with the annual misery of the Ciliwung flood. Luckily, mass media provide the distraction of Olympic games and movie stars at film festivals. Although at the same time those media people, especially journalists, experienced their jobs as a difficult profession caused by censorship and harassment by body guards. While teachers are poorly paid, their salaries are reduced by compulsory deductions, they could not afford critical comments without disciplinary measures taken against them by

bureaucracy. It is not surprising that high school youngsters fight each other in school gangs, caused by trivialities. (Nowadays, members of the Indonesian Attorneys Association abuse one another physically at the recent national convention).

Such is the world through Doyok's eyes. The facts of his life are all embedded in this world to be enjoyed or to cause him sadness, frustration and minimal hopes for personal fulfillment. The comics-cartoon from Pos Kota, a newspaper read by the "man in the street" presents their hero Doyok, who is depicted as a Javanese with traditional clothes and views, totally out of context in the changing world around him. Increasing modern way of life, national development with its unintended consequences leaves him bewildered and maladjusted.

We are inclined to smile at his perplexity but some of us will recognize the same apprehension and bewilderment, how we sometimes feel unprepared to cope with a fast changing world.