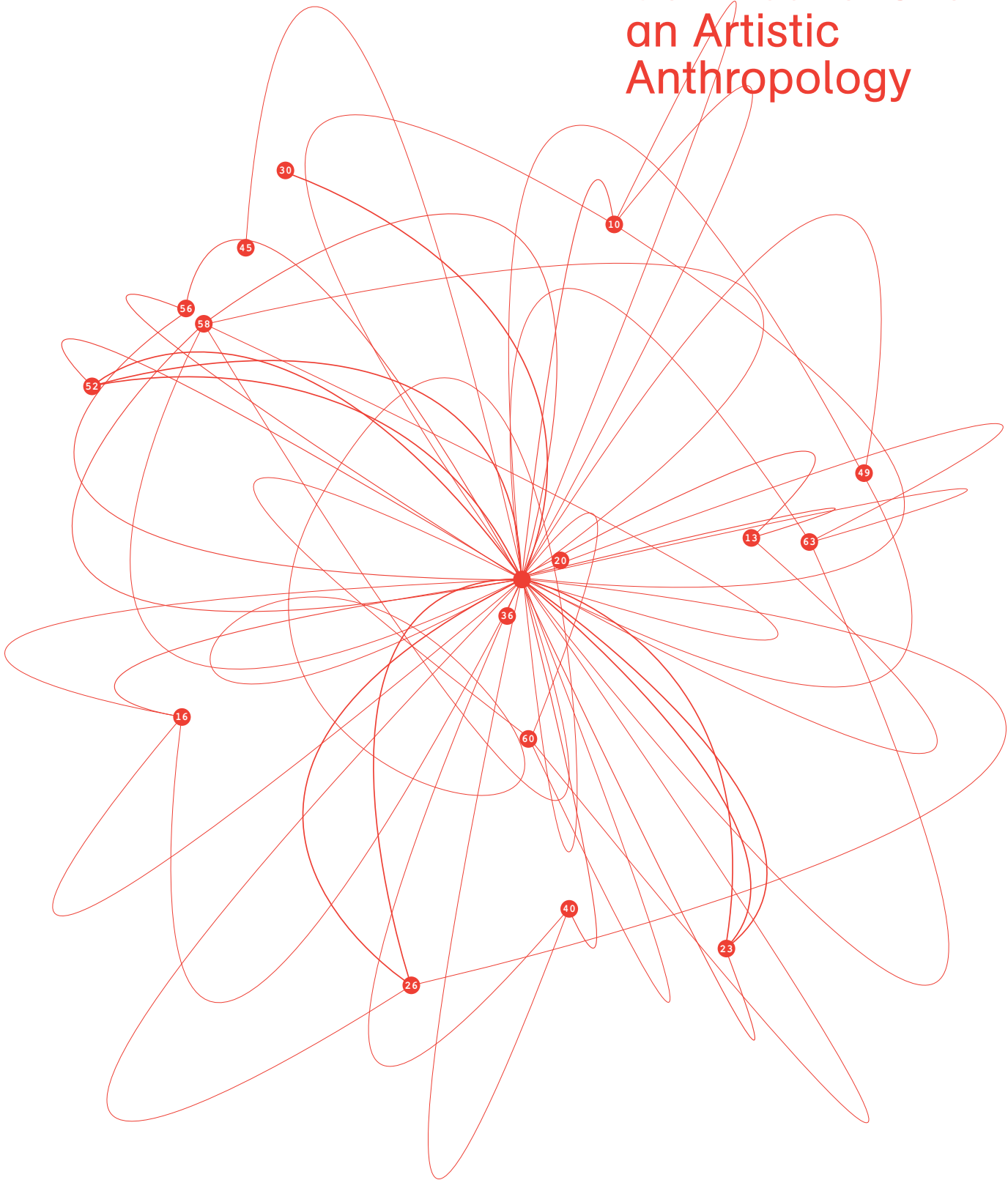


#1

NJP Reader

Contributions to
an Artistic
Anthropology



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Editorial: Youngchul Lee Henk Slager

In the fall of 2008, the Nam June Paik Art Center (NJP Art Center) opened its doors for the first time with the much-talked-about exhibition ***Now Jump***. The exhibition's title, clearly accentuating the present moment, made at once clear that topicality is the Center's curatorial premise and the here and now is considered a time to act. ***Now Jump*** showed Nam June Paik's work in four different "stations", in dialogue with the work of more than sixty contemporary artists, thus underscoring the artistic importance of the concept of ***potentiality***, i.e. the capacity of works of art to continuously interact and interconnect in various contexts. The NJP Art Center's role as a connectivity machine was crystal clear in the ***Now Jump*** exhibition. Working with Nam June Paik's artistic and intellectual legacy also implies that the experimental and interventionist energy of the 20th century should be reactivated. At the same time, Nam June Paik's work invites current artistic practices to regenerate aesthetic, political and social potentialities which are able to question and redefine relationships between art, philosophy, media and life.

In addition to functioning as an exhibition space, the NJP Art Center operates as a curatorial lab and research center. Many parallel activities such as seminars and lectures are organized focusing on the topicality of research into Nam June Paik's practice ("The Gift of Nam June Paik"). Recently, these activities have been expanded into a new, discursive platform in the form of a bi-annual publication called the ***NJP Reader - Contributions to an Artistic Anthropology***.

The aim of the ***NJP Reader*** is to recontextualize Nam June Paik's artistic thought and random access strategies in a topical discursive practice. A leading question is: How have Nam June Paik's multimedial experiments, performances, and sculptures, and the relationship between humans and nonhumans that they suggested, affected current artistic practices and

discourses? Nam June Paik once said, "Dada is the DNA of twentieth century art and Duchamp is at its center, while video art opens up a way out." For Paik, video art functioned as a Deleuzian nomadic war machine mutating visual elements while creating accelerative and interconnective lines of perceptual transformations and metamorphoses.

Obviously, Nam June Paik's nomadic disposition requires a conceptual framework that goes beyond an art historical narrative. Paik's artistic activities and their characteristic, radical transmediality pointed, for the first time in the art world, to the failure and ultimately definitive dismantling of medium-specificity and the monolithic conceptual framework of traditional art history. Current art practices no longer desire to merge with a linear tradition of being inspired by preeminent precursors. Rather, contemporary generations of artists translate and rearticulate work of older artists into novel artistic strategies and topical significations meaningful for our day. Gordon Matta-Clark's work is an interesting example of upcycling and re-articulation. Could Matta-Clark's work still have such impact today without Rirkrit Tiravanija's re-articulation and the relational aesthetic perspective he connected with that?

Aiming to bestow upon Paik's work a reflection that extends beyond his role as the pioneer of video art, the Nam June Paik Art Center has been researching Paik's ability to eschew instrumental thought and articulate simultaneously the cultural and technological, the human and nonhuman. This ability to produce a "seamless fabric of nature-culture", to use Bruno Latour's terminology, is evident in the way Paik creates complex configurations such as the performances with Charlotte Moorman where the body, the technological and the social coexist. This resistance to instrumental thought emerges as a possible artistic strategy in Paik's practice that is reminiscent of the concept of the "new barbarians", as described by Hardt and Negri. In the same way that the "new barbarians reduce what exists to rubble" in order to find a way out, so Paik turned his back on his previous experience to focus on television technology and question its ontology. Yet, how do the artistic strategies Nam June Paik developed translate into and rearticulate current art practices?

In order to map potential strategies, the *NJP Reader* will introduce the concept of **artistic anthropology** into the art discourse as an invitation for mapping new conceptual systems and strategies. *NJP Reader's* editorial board chose this hypothetical concept, since topical transmedial art and its related conceptual frameworks seem particularly willing to associate with how our current human existence is defined by a biopolitical paradigm. Technological advance and its enhancement of a complex political-legislative-economic tissue increasingly interwoven with human beings and their bodies seems to point to a biopolitical power, once announced by Foucault, connoting all levels of reflection on human life. The Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben is a preeminent and topical exponent of this anthropological perspective. In *Homo Sacer*, he investigates whether the current biopolitical constellation still permits a so-called bare life as a state of exception. Could such state of being also be disciplined by a ubiquitous biopolitical system?

What does such biopolitical paradigm mean for the practice of art? Could it be that only visual art is still able to visualize the contours of an apocalyptic and lyric form of **bare life**, Roger Buergel asks in *Documenta 12* (2007).

Only one conclusion seems to be prolific. Art created under these biopolitical conditions cannot help but take artificiality as an explicit theme. In contrast to earlier forms of art relating specifically to human existence, now that existence is not shown directly. Today, human life is merely documented, since documentation seems to be the preeminently medial strategy of the biopolitical paradigm. In an earlier Documenta catalogue, Boris Groys already spoke of the documentary turn in his essay *Art in the Age of Biopolitics*. "Art documentation describes the realm of biopolitics by showing how the living can be replaced by the artificial, and how the artificial can be made living by means of a narrative", Groys said. From this perspective, he describes a topical, artistic practice deploying all possible media while ultimately revealing other paths for biopolitics in the form of installations. "Rather than fighting off modernity, they develop strategies of resisting and inscription based on situation and context, which makes it possible to transform the artificial into something living and the



Nam June Paik Art Center (exterior).



Nam June Paik Art Center (installation view).

repetitive into something unrepeatable", Groys maintains.

Thus, art seems to have the capacity to contribute specifically to an anthropological knowledge production. After all, art has always reflected on the singular - "the whatever singularity" - and the transcendental preconditions of human life. Art has always looked for what connects people, or what will be connective possibilities - "the coming community." And now ultimately, from an artistic perspective and in a transmedial manner, art will attempt to respond to the Brechtian question of "What keeps mankind alive?", a question so magnificently actualized in the 2009 Istanbul Biennale.

In order to guarantee dynamic reactions to such questions, the editors decided the *NJP Reader* should be an open platform for generating novel ideas, connections, and concepts. For that reason they will try to avoid a stifling editorial input. Instead, they will invite as many artists and intellectuals as possible to participate in the editorial process. Therefore, the first *NJP Reader* is based on a questionnaire, a conceptual inquiry that will help the *NJP Reader* in creating novel lines of thought and conceptual schemes. For the questionnaire publication, *NJP Reader* #1, the editors developed three questions:

1. Artistic anthropology intends to produce novel models of relationality and connectivity. Could (Nam June Paik's legacy as a form of) artistic anthropology contribute to an artistic discourse going beyond the framework of "relational aesthetics"? What artists in our day have developed relevant examples of rethinking and recontextualizing an artistic anthropology?

2. What could artistic anthropology mean to current artistic practice? How could it relate to medium-specific qualities? Is it a form of artistic communication defined by a postmedium-condition? Or is it a practice demanding the concept of medium-specificity to change?

3. What could artistic anthropology - as a form of knowledge production - mean for the current classification system? Will it challenge the dominant paradigms of the established humanities and sciences? What type of new models might trigger this? How could

artistic anthropology contribute to a better and more political understanding of the “human condition”? And what could artistic anthropology mean for the concept of art in general?

These questions have been presented to a broad group of international, renowned artists, critics, and curators. ***NJP Reader’s*** editorial board is very pleased to be able to publish many inspiring and provocative answers. Contributors are: Ricardo Basbaum, Jean Paul Fargier, Ranjit Hoskote and Nancy Adajania, Jeonghwan Jo, Clara Kim, Lev Manovich, Arjen Mulder, Wongil Park, John Rajchman, Susanne Rennert, Kisspál Szabolcs, Simon O’Sullivan, Peter Weibel, Haegue Yang, Hiroshi Yoshioka and David Zerbib.

The texts based on the questions posed are not only the content of the first issue of the ***NJP Reader***. They will also be a starting point for an expert meeting delving into the concept of ***Artistic Anthropology***. Location and organization: NJP Art Center. Time: Spring of 2010. In ***NJP Reader*** issue # 2 the outcome of the expert meeting will be discussed further.

Young Chul Lee is Director of the Nam June Paik Art Center and artistic director of its inaugural festival Now Jump. He was artistic director of the 1997 Gwangju Biennial, 2000 Busan Biennial, and 2005 Anyang Public Art Project, as well as Professor at the Kaywon School of Art and Design.

Henk Slager is dean of the Utrecht Graduate School of Visual Art and Design (MaHKU) and its professor of Artistic Research. Slager was also one of the curators of the 2008 Shanghai Biennial and, among other curatorial and academic practices, has also been a tutor at De Appel’s Curatorial Training Program since 1994.

백남준아트센터 특별기획전
Nam June Paik Art Center Special Exhibition

신화와 전자
테크놀로지
EXPOSITION of mythology
ELectronic technology

09.6.12 - 10.4

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NAM JUNE PAIK ART CENTER

세계의 역사는
우리에게
가르쳐 준다.
게임에서
이길 수 없다면
규칙을 바꿔라!

| ?-? = ∞ | NAM JUNE PAIK ART CENTER
백남준아트센터

Ricardo Basbaum

Ricardo Basbaum is a writer and artist working in Rio de Janeiro. Basbaum is co-editor of 'ITEM' art magazine, co-director of the Espaço AGORA/CAPACETE in Rio de Janeiro, and Assistant Professor of Art History at the Universidade Estadual do Rio de Janeiro. Basbaum's work was shown at Documenta 12 (2007) and the 7th Shanghai Biennale (2008).

It is absolutely clear that after modernism, anthropology has replaced history as the main guideline for the transformations on art practice. To search for the new has no longer a historical quality - the foundation of a new time - but an anthropological aspect - the investigation of the limits of how the "human" can be constructed or where it can be located in relation to the borderlines of man/machine, man/animal, and nature/culture. The last fifty years have seen several gestures of reinvention of the human being and its particular features – interiority, sensoriality, cultural singularity, symbolic system, ritualization, etc. – in the sense of exploring the limits of what has been known or taken as convention, consequently acknowledging that these edges should be negotiated according to different living conditions and cultural moments.

Therefore, it is correct to state that any relational and connective model experienced at a certain moment was produced somehow through collective processes including art works as main objects of such dynamics. Obviously, if the limits of the art field are enacted by its actors, the art practice is one of the main collective gestures to mobilize the outside of culture and its symbolic systems pointing precisely to what is still to be achieved. Where art production exists and takes place, a layer of formation is always triggered and stands there for the invention of the "human". But it is also clear that such investigation encounters more and more hybrid forms and that recent developments show an increasing number of models built as a mix of topics that were kept apart before. At the 21st century, the limits of human/nonhuman, man/machine, human/animal are quite blurred and this can be taken as an important symptom of



Ricardo Basbaum
Would you like to participate in an artistic experience?,
work in progress since 1994.
Painted steel object, experience.
Participation Lenir de Miranda,
Pelotas, Brazil, 2009.
Mercosul Biennale
Photo by participant
Courtesy of the artist



Ricardo Basbaum
Would you like to participate in an artistic experience?,
work in progress since 1994.
Painted steel object, experience.
Participation Gê Fonseca,
Pelotas, Brazil, 2009.
Mercosul Biennale
Photo by Cintia Langie
Courtesy of the artist

the current state of knowledge. Today, the anthropological membranes (taking for granted that we are using a former discipline as a means for getting in contact with experience) are one of the frontiers where we have been experimenting with *who we are*, and *what we want to be*.

The practice of a relational aesthetics has been a condition for contemporary art since the late 1950s. The recent trend of relational aesthetics only reveals a specific moment where relationality can be played in terms of a complete conceptual autonomy open to any sort of structure or event which can then be enacted as an insider to the art arena. Bourriaud's concept, however, is too limited in the sense that it has not taken into consideration the work of artists such as Allan Kaprow, Hélio Oiticica, and Lygia Clark – especially when it is known that the latter has developed an entire body of work directly conceived on relationality. Thus a much more careful and political approach needs to be considered; one that would devise the several different territories of the relational game avoiding the current generational generalization. If we are to consider the possibilities of an "artistic anthropology", then the most interesting would be to search for its "transversality" (Guattari), in the sense of encountering the region where art and anthropology can interchange without hierarchy or excessive generalization and simplification. Nevertheless, maybe a stable encounter as such would be impossible – only a dynamic situation can be reached, one where we are captured as part of its plot, actors or agents engaged in the transformation we devise.

Such a field in-between art and anthropology – an area where art contributes to redesign the contact zones between the "human" and its outside – could never be specifically medium-related. Any means of practice can be considered a form of action. The decision to either function as an artwork or not does not unfold from medium-specificity. Rather it would derive from a condition of "conceptual autonomy" (Michael Lingner), in the sense that today any artwork performs a complex statement about its nature as an art project, both as an autonomous entity and in relation to a circuit, network or cultural and political environment. Such "double-work" or transversal condition (or extra-disciplinary, according to Brian Holmes) is beyond medium specificity and

requires an awareness of the flexibility of the art concept. A concept that does change globally and culturally and should be performed again at each new gesture; it can no longer naively be taken for granted.

Art can be considered a *new* achievement (object and process) in the cultural development of mankind. Only in the last 250 years has it been discussed under a conceptual basis and a referential discourse. Before that, it was carried without any specific place, being bounced from the ritual and magic to the purely religious and sometimes communicational – positions which lack a more proper mediation as “fugue”, and therefore the more precise lines of flight were encountered under its condition as “art”. Art has – fortunately – continuously meant something plural, which escapes any fixed and static definition (i.e. a political condition). An “artistic anthropology” makes sense as a methodological device to examine art practice in the global arena - and the “Global Art and the Museum” project by Hans Belting and Peter Weibel is quite significant here - although it will always require a further negotiation among all the actors involved (artists, curators, critics, historians, audiences, institutions, and so on) to get through any specific and detailed art discourse and achievement. But what apparently seems to be a gesture backwards or a withdrawal is in fact a leap into the present and towards the future. There is an urge to rescale practices involving contact and affection (which account for the “body”) into the speediness of the new communicational connectivity and into the complexity of the various cultural games. Obviously, the horizon of a “knowledge production” is to be maintained as well as art’s features towards the continuous redesign of its lines in terms of confrontation, political dialogism and freedom of expression. In line with its tradition, the art field has always been an area where closure and locked ideas continuously find the counter-exercise of otherness.



Ricardo Basbaum
Would you like to participate in an artistic experience?,
work in progress since 1994.
Painted steel object, experience.
Participation Grupo
de Pesquisa Políticas
do Sensível no Corpo Docente,
Pelotas, Brazil, 2009.
Mercosul Biennale
Photo by participant
Courtesy of the artist

Jean-Paul Fargier

Jean-Paul Fargier, Professor of Cinema Studies, lives and works in Paris as a video artist and television producer. Fargier is also an author and journalist, as well as an art and cinema critic.

When I began making activist (political) videos in 1969 inspired by Jean-Luc Godard, there were only five or six artists in Paris really interested in that new medium. A few years later, when I started writing about video – around the time Nam June Paik finished *Global Groove* (1973) – there were a dozen video artists in France. In five years, the number of artists had doubled. I knew all of them personally. We formed a small circle hoping that video art would expand further. In fact, we were confident that one day video art would flourish everywhere. And it sure did.

Today, there are hundreds of video artists in France and thousands of artists around the world working with electronic, digital images. My objective is to discover at least ten new video artists every year, thus I visit museums (where one tends to see the same artists over and over), galleries (less closed ranks), and particularly video festivals (places of genuine surprises). Presently, I could quote at last fifty names of people who seem to dig the same channel (one meaning of the polysemous word groove) Paik superbly opened and endlessly travelled: that of post-television.

When dealing with video, many critics fail to connect with television. Thus, they are entirely missing the point. “Relational aesthetics” disconnected from television, a “post-medium condition” overlooking a “post-television era” cannot understand the forty-year explosion of video art as artistic force. As for me, it is exactly the linkage between video and television Paik’s works revealed, that makes me continue to explore and unfold video art. I have not yet found a better definition of that link than the statement I made in 1975, “video is a self-awareness of television”. This could also be the definition of Paik’s *Global Groove*. But where does that awareness come from? My Sartre-inspired statement could lead one to believe that awareness could spring from video

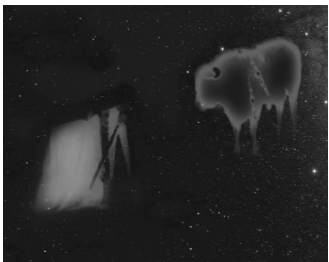
itself whereas television only produces “unawareness”. Television, however, is nothing more than the unconscious. That necessitates the modification of my first statement. Thus, in the 1980s I created the statement, “every video phenomenon is a TV effect.”

If I were to provide three examples of post-television artists, working in France to diversify the TV effects of video, I would cite: Alain Bourges, Lydie-Jean-Dit-Pannel, and Laurent Millet. However, their work cannot be presented in just one phrase.

Under the title “Esquisses tauromachiques/ Bullfighting Sketches”, presented for the first time in Marseille at Instant Videos (www.instantsvideo.com) in November 2008, Alain Bourges carved five brilliant series from passes of bullfights - probably from different bullfights but presented as a synthesis of one mythical bullfight. The synthesized work shows all phases required in a bullfight - entrance of the bull, analysis by the cape, stabbing, wielding with muleta or red cape, stabbing the bull to death - with a particular and profound exploration of colors. The colors passing from bright, irradiant, solar, nocturnal, to fuliginous denote each special moment similar to how a painting colors its scenes. The splendor of the digital palette is here at its peak of poetic vibrations. Bourges demonstrates with bullfighting what Paik did with the Korean dance: a videozation of post-television.

For ten years, Lydie Jean-Dit-Pannel is in the process of realizing a summary of the world under the title **Panlogon**. In its polished, brilliant, and dazzling images, **Panlogon** is one of the most overwhelming answers to the globalization of images portraying a technological power similar to Paik’s **Global Groove**. Lydie Jean-Dit-Pannel manages to materialize a global link in gathering thousands of tattooed arms creating a chain in which she is just a mere link and filmed them in one shot.

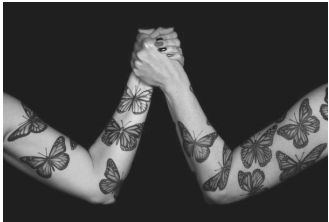
La constellation des choses/Constellation of things by Laurent Millet raises questions on how to articulate the world. Millet became involved in video work five years ago. His video shootings are dependent on sheer luck framing animals and human beings in their quest to survive. After editing the film, he tries to translate these activities into a layout compelling the images to reveal more than what they show. The film ends with a succession and entanglement of points - just



Alain Bourges
Esquisses tauromachiques, 2008 (still images).
Courtesy of the artist



Lydie Jean-Dit-Pannel
Nothing, maybe, 2008.
Video, 60'
Courtesy of the artist



Lydie Jean-Dit-Pannel
Auto-arm wrestling, 2007.
photo by David Brunel
Courtesy of the artist

like the sharpness of pixel points. Writing images with everything light retains, taming granular sparkles, putting them into order and making them to stand out: this is the intended, complex, productive obsession that leads Millet in his work as a photographer of eternal moment and as a video artist of instant eternity.

These are three beautiful anthropological and artistic journeys related to Paik and yet there are other exciting ones to come. If you are open to it, that is.

Ranjit Hoskote & Nancy Adajania

Ranjit Hoskote is a poet and curator. In addition to having published work in numerous Indian and international journals, Hoskote is the author of four collections of poetry, has translated the Marathi poet Vasant Abaji Dahake, co-translated the German novelist and essayist Ilija Trojanow, and edited an anthology of contemporary Indian verse.

Nancy Adajania writes and lectures extensively on contemporary Indian art, especially new media art and its political and cultural contexts. As Editor-in-Chief of Art India (2000-2002), Adajania developed a discursive space, in an Asian context, for emergent new-media and interactive public art practices and social projects on a global level.

1

A pioneer of the networked world, Nam June Paik was an exponent of globalism decades before the advent of globalisation made transcontinental mobility and transcultural fluency practicable or even truly imaginable.

Important as the revolutionary advances in the technology of communication were to his art, it is possible to see his experiments in the bridging of distance and the destabilisation of proximity - through the melding of cultural behaviours, philosophical ideas and evolving media - as having been inspired by Buddhist models of the mind, experience and illumination. A recurrent motif in his art was that of a global community of practitioners: this bears a strong affinity with the vision of the infinitely many yet mutually reflecting and interlinked nodes of the “net of Indra”, in the key Mahayana text known as the ***Buddha-avatamsaka-sutra*** or Garland Sutra.

In the same vein, Paik’s insistence from the 1960s through the 1990s that there was no centre or periphery, no subject or object, no technology or nature - in defiance of the obvious barriers established, variously, by Cold War geopolitics, the devastation of the

environment by industry, and the widening rifts between individuals and communities in transitional societies - suggests a specific position from within the Buddhist philosophical spectrum towards the dogma of polarity. It is possible to read his negation of the standard binaries of Western philosophy and culture as expressing a viewpoint articulated by the Yogachara school of Buddhist psychology. The fundamental doctrine of the Yogachara is that of ***chitta-matra***, or “mind-only”, meaning that since reality is apprehensible only through the mind, and all experience is made possible only by the mind, it is by purifying the mind rigorously of all polarities that we can eliminate all the defilements of separateness and difference, passing beyond the constructs of space and time to achieve a true and illuminating embrace of reality.

As a shape-shifter and context-changer, Paik worked from the principle that environments are not inherited but can be configured through unpredictable encounters, dialogues among dissimilars, transcultural journeys. His own movements across milieux, from Korea through Japan and Germany to the USA, reflect this belief in a world unconstrained by borders. He was able to carry forward his preoccupations, informed by Buddhist and shamanic ideas, into a space of dialogue where his interlocutors included John Cage and Karlheinz Stockhausen, with their specific interests in randomised order and the aleatory de-construction of an experience pre-formatted by normative conditioning.

2

At least five clear elements may be discerned in Nam June Paik’s complex practice: performance, technology, collaboration, research and dialogue. Taken together, these five elements weave into an artistic anthropology. Such an anthropology obliges the practitioner to amplify the solitary and even narcissistic expressive action that lies at the core of art-making by reference to two mandates premised on sociality. First: the blurring of the line separating the artist’s consciousness from those of her or his viewers. And second: the embrace of an explicit self-consciousness concerning performance, reaction, feedback loops and the interaction of affects and desires, which is generated

by the use of new media technologies in art.

Correspondingly, Paik's lasting legacy to emergent art practices, through the wide acceptance of this artistic anthropology, is two aims. First: the production of art as a mutable and self-disruptive interface between artistic desire and its recipients and contexts. And second: the continuous activation of new audiences that are, in fact, participants in the artistic process - whether as respondents to surveys, subjects of interviews, providers of testimony, interrogators of artistic intent, or collaborators in installations, performances or discursive works.

An orientation towards artistic anthropology transfers the emphasis from the art-work to the work of art, which can be an act of discursive as well as expressive performance. This choice commits the artist to disclosing patterns of insight, knowledge and co-production rather than refining the use of one medium or another. The medium is, eventually, determined as a function of the specific conceptual logic of the work; it serves, rather than eclipsing, the democratising impulse of the work of art.

3

We would offer two examples of such an artistic anthropology: the ongoing project, convened from Berlin, titled *The Dictionary of War* (www.dictionaryofwar.org), and *Khirkeeyaan*, a 2006 project by the Bombay-based artist Shaina Anand.

The Dictionary of War is a globally nomadic platform that re-stages itself with every edition as a locus where the most urgent political concepts of the epoch, revolving around conflict and dissensus, are subjected to scrutiny through a spectrum of approaches including the scholarly, the artistic, the critical, the ludic, the expository and the epigrammatic. The Dictionary thus produces an incremental encyclopaedia of global unrest by collaborative means, extending itself along a potentially planet-wide network, manifesting itself both as a theatre of nuanced rhetorical performances as well as an open-ended online video documentation of these. The Dictionary operates through the structural principle

of the swarm or the cluster, building up and sustaining a critical momentum of research through successive gatherings. It experiments with the generation of new and intersecting global publics, while renewing a collegial as against a hierarchical pedagogy.

In April 2006, Shaina Anand intervened in the settlement of Khirkee at the semi-urban, semi-rural margins of New Delhi, to assess the possibilities of sparking off a sense of community, however provisional and ephemeral, among its denizens. These were segregated, not only by sectarian and class interests, but also by the typological divisions of the settlement's informal economy: its residential, commercial, licensed and illegal-migrant sectors. Anand opted to link Khirkee's constituents by deploying a micro-media solution: in a remarkable community art intervention, she short-circuited the passive logic of televisual reality and the NGO-driven pattern of community networking. Crafting an open-circuit TV system from available TV sets, cheap CC-TV equipment, and several meters of cable snaking through the streets of Khirkee, Anand produced conversations and performances among friends and strangers living in different neighbourhoods within the settlement. While these self-generated, "real" reality shows contoured the fault lines of caste, class, religion, region and gender, they also allowed invisible desires and aspirations to surface, for the first time, from behind the doors of the sweatshops and the windows of the women's quarters.

Anand created a situation where her "film" was made instantly, with neither cinematographer nor editor involved; here, the participant was also the witness, the viewer and the user. Not only did she stand the genre of classical documentary on its head, but she also poked a hole through the specious claims of the televisual medium, which doles out a cheap democracy through its SMS polls and rigged talk shows. Anand politicised an existential situation dominated by the themes of hopelessness and routine: she actively created a public sphere and prepared the ground, in an unpromising situation, for what Nancy Adajania has elsewhere called "performative democracy."



Shaina Anand
Khirkeeyaan, 2006 (video still and/or working still).
Courtesy of the artist

Jeonghwan Jo

Jeonghwan Jo studied proletarian literature in the age of Japanese colonization at Seoul National University where he also obtained his PhD in Literature. Currently, Jo lectures on Marxist theory, postmodern social theory and cultural theory. Jo is the author of *Democratic National Literature and Self Criticism, Global Empire, 21st century Spartacus*. Jo is the editor of the *Autonomy Review* and has also translated several of Antonio Negri's books into Korean.

1

Random Materialism, founding relational aesthetics, views contingency as an important aesthetic element where a new formation produced in the interaction of various elements is deployed as an aesthetic method. From that perspective, Nam June Paik might be considered an artist who based his work on relational aesthetics. However, rather than simply departing from contingency, Nam June Paik considered relational aesthetics a way to consciously detect novel connections in heterogeneous forms and he materialized and proved that in poetic ways. He made a great effort to reveal novel connections by deliberately deconstructing the boundaries between sound and image, electricity and magnetism, East and West, life and death, harmonious sound and disharmonious noise. In fact, Nam June Paik was an artist who understood and presented heterogeneity as a multiplicity. For him, video art and CCTV art were the tools to materialize those ideas.

Today, a similar artistic activity is practiced not only by individual artists, but also by groups of artists composed of people who are hardly acknowledged as traditional artists. Currently we are witnessing prolific forms of artists' groups implying social-artistic movements that surpass institutionalized art. Thus, both economic and social movements involve artistic activities while organizing people, objects, and technologies. For example, in Seoul in 2008, millions of people participated in candlelight vigils for several months. This enormous performance mobilizing many people through various

artistic tools might be considered an example of a new artistic-anthropological event. If artistic anthropology not only views actions produced by artists as artistic events, but includes all not-institutionalized actions and performances, it clearly expands and recontextualizes a topical artistic anthropology.

2

Nam June Paik understood the differences between the 1917 revolution and the 1968 revolution as a transition from electricity to electronics and he started deploying CCTV and video technology in his art works. In his work, he switched from sound to image and from image to sound and he blurred the boundary between the visible and the invisible. Today's digital technology has advanced Nam June Paik's works to the extreme by deconstructing the boundaries between sound, image, and text. In our day, it is hard to imagine a world of art without digital technologies. Broad use of computers and the Internet has become both a social and historical condition for artistic practices. Because of that, the subject of art has changed dramatically. UCC (User Created Contents) which separated from the institutionalized art world is a clear symptom demonstrating that artistic practices using digital technologies are widely disseminated. UCC is not only an important resource for creating economic value, it also is an important method of communication between human beings. It still is on a basic level, yet there is a great desire to create a higher quality of UCC, whereby major industries also promote UCC to enlarge economic profits.

Nam June Paik was one of the first artists who tried to demolish the boundaries between artists and non-artists. In our day, the desire for more UCC is not expressed by a particular artist, but by society at large. Currently, digital technology combined with nano and laser technologies actualizes the world of imagination in ways one could hardly have thought of before. For example, a very impressive artwork by a Japanese artist tried to show the flow of life by creating flowing veins through the laser beam of a camera.

Since art has become an activity to reproduce the world rather than simply reflecting on it, the boundaries between life, labor and art have been demolished. Neither traditional humanities focusing on human beings nor science objectifying nature could ever have been able to explain the coalescence of life, labor, and art. Such merging produces symmetric relationships, while at the same time it opposes hierarchic forms of thought. The notion of artistic anthropology clearly points to symmetric connections in a revolutionary way, because of its attempt to overcome dichotomized worlds and their oppositions such as ancient and modern, East and West, yin and yang, heaven and earth, female and male, man of power and common people. An artistic anthropology could even have the potential to surpass the division between the humanities and the sciences. Yet, artistic anthropology's apparent relational and symmetrical nature seems to restrain dynamic flows of modification. It seems to imply the production of the new, while it also allows for a reproduction of an existing formation. Obviously, an artistic anthropology is not able yet to erase a chronological orientation. Besides, it seems to be unable to create new openings and connections, because of its understanding of existence as a whole. Therefore, it threatens to create pseudo metamorphoses and a return to existing forms and rigid totalities. This means that an artistic anthropology as a hybrid of life and art necessitates implying the political. Thus, we need to combine an artistic anthropology with a political science of art based on an artistic situation of life. Then an artistic anthropology could participate in a social art practice and a revolutionary transformation of the world.

Clara Kim

Clara Kim is Gallery Director and Curator at REDCAT (Roy and Edna Disney/CalArts Theater), the California Institute of the Arts' (CalArts) downtown center for innovative visual, media and performing arts.

Perhaps it has to do something with capitalism, a market economy that has made art into a commodity for the wealthy elite, auctions that have inflated contemporary art values surpassing that of age-old treasures. I am not nostalgic, but if anything can characterize the last twenty years of art production it is the prevalence and domination of the market. Perhaps it is an inevitable fate of human development in a capitalist market world order that art too finds its monetary equivalent. While other forms of culture such as music seem to be going through radical changes as the Internet and digital technology transform the way we receive and disseminate information, contemporary art seems to be heading ever more towards a codified system with more professionalized players, powerful mainstream institutions and artists putting their marks on everything from t-shirts, luxury goods, handbags, window displays, architecture to reality television shows. Contemporary art finds its rise to legitimacy in popular culture proven to be an investment worth participating in - witness the cultural institutions being developed in Dubai and Abu Dhabi and the franchising of museums elsewhere where cultural capital equates to political and economic capital. Yet the question remains what is at stake and what are the anthropological dimensions of this era of hyper commodification?

What distinguished the social and economic context of artmaking in SoHo in the late 1950s and 1960s was the blank slate that artists, poets, musicians, composers and dancers were working and living in. Literally occupying the emptied out, abandoned warehouse buildings of SoHo, artists like Nam June Paik - whose experiments in music were as radical as those in video - were working in an unusual context that was a response to the dominance of abstract expressionism in production and discourse. This motley group - who

came to define the Fluxus movement - gathered in SoHo lofts or in self-organized festivals participating in messy, unformulated, but invigorating melding of various art forms, where everything was left unsacred and therefore possible. Their broad range of activities including performances, publications, concerts and festivals, and the distribution mechanism they created - through mail-order warehouses and fluxshops - characterized this particular moment. Artists were working against and between media (or intermedia, as it was called by Maciunas) in a collective spirit that merged work and life creating a context for vibrant new forms to emerge.

Visual art production today couldn't be more different. Commercialization has created a codification of forms supported by a system of distribution (i.e. galleries, magazines, art fairs, museums, etc.) that reinforces itself into neat categories of what is collectable and what is not. In the 21st century, even some forty years after Paik revolutionized video art, no new novel forms have emerged though technology has taken giant leaps forward transforming every facet of our everyday life from the way we read newspapers to the way we conduct business/research to social behavior. The dissemination, production, and absorption of information — the information superhighway, as Paik termed early on — radically changed visual culture and experience, yet much of artmaking today is still rooted in traditional forms (auction values of contemporary paintings still break records, while video art and media-based work hardly ever make their way to auction houses).

If one ventures to state that rampant commercialization and commodification of contemporary art has dampened creativity - however loosely one defines it - or a spirit of experimentation that characterized for example the Fluxus scene, what replaces that spirit? Do the systems of distribution dictate creative enterprise? If so, do we need a different set of terms to describe and define artistic achievement - in terms of press and promotions or who has the most hits, facebook friends and twitter feeds?

More than anything created within the realm of visual art exploring and exploiting the mediation of technology, the Wooster Group's sophisticated and riveting theatrical productions capture the chaos,



The Wooster Group
HAMLET
Performance, New York City, United States, 2007.
Directed by Elizabeth LeCompte
Photo (c) Paula Court
Pictured (l to r) Casey Spooner, Scott Shepherd



The Wooster Group
HAMLET
Performance, New York City, United States, 2007.
Directed by Elizabeth LeCompte
Photo (c) Paula Court
Pictured (l to r) Ari Fliakos, Kate Valk



The Wooster Group
HAMLET
Performance, New York City, United States, 2007.
Directed by Elizabeth LeCompte
Photo (c) Paula Court
Pictured (l to r) Scott Shepherd

attention deficit syndrome, and simultaneity of visual experience today. Central to their multimedia productions is video and sound technology that is as much a character in their work as the ensemble of actors and artists. Their recent production of **Hamlet** takes its cues from Richard Burton's legendary 1964 Broadway version — a production that was recorded from seventeen camera angles and edited into a film to give viewers a live theatrical experience called Teatrofilm. The Wooster Group channels Burton via multiple video screens as a live cast “performs” their roles. These edited clips become the fodder of the production, the actors taking cues from the video footage. When the footage is in fast forward or in reverse, the actors mimic the movement of analog video reversing or forwarding time, while also channeling the ghosts of other **Hamlet** productions including Kenneth Branagh's Hollywood version pulled from Youtube during the performance. All takes place in fast-paced, almost hypnotic barrage of video information where memory, mediation, and live action collide into a meta-dimensional space. Perhaps the space of performing arts or performance art is where experiments in new media and technology are more radically played out, outside the commodified object, in a context that depends on collective skills, knowledge, and creativity.

Another example is a musical group called Lucky Dragons, based in Los Angeles, whose sonic experiments depend, in their words, on “fragile networks held together by things such as skin contact, unfamiliar language, temporary logic, the spirit of celebration and things that work but you don't know why.” Audience participation is required and becomes the mechanism by which sound is created through digital devices, producing new and temporary soundscapes between human contact and technological abyss. At the heart of their music is social engagement and collective production like “simple and ancient patterns coming together and falling apart in a sincere attempt to let wires and screens and words become clear and crystal.”

Somewhere here - in a space outside the current trends of visual production - are the lessons to be learned.

Lev Manovich

Lev Manovich is a Professor in the Visual Arts Department, University of California -San Diego, a Director of the Software Studies Initiative at California Institute for Telecommunications and Information Technology (Calit2), and a Visiting Research Professor at Goldsmiths College (University of London), De Montfort University (UK) and College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales (Sydney).

Academics, new media artists, and journalists have been writing extensively about “new media” since the early 1990s. In many of these discussions, a single term came to stand for the whole set of new technologies, new expressive and communicative possibilities, and new forms of community and sociality which were developing around computers and the Internet. The term was “digital.” It received its official seal of approval, so to speak, in 1996 when the director of MIT Media Lab Nicholas Negroponte collected his *Wired* columns into the book entitled *Being Digital*. Thirteen years later, this term still dominates both popular and academic understanding of what new media is about.

When I did Google searches for “digital,” “interactive,” and “multimedia” on August 28, 2009, the first search returned 757 million results; the other two only returned between 235 and 240 million each. Doing searches on Google Scholar produced similar results: 10,800,000 for “digital”, 4,150,000 for “web,” 3,920,000 for “software,” 2,760,000 for “interactive”, 1,870,000 for “multimedia.” Based on these numbers, Negroponte appears to be right.

I don’t need to convince anybody today about the transformative effects the Internet and the web have already had on human culture and society. What I do want to point out is the centrality of another element of the computer revolution which so far has received less theoretical attention. This element is software.

I want to suggest that none of the new media authoring and editing techniques we associate with computers is simply a result of media “being digital.” The new ways of media access, distribution, analysis,

generation and manipulation are all due to **software**. Which means that they are the result of particular choices made by individuals, companies, and consortiums who develop software. Some of these choices concern basic principles and protocols which govern the modern computing environment. The “cut and paste” commands built into all software running under Graphical User Interface and its newer versions (such as iPhone OS), for instance, or the one-way hyperlinks as implemented in World Wide Web technology. Other choices are specific to particular types of software (e.g. illustration programs) or individual software packages.

If particular software techniques or interface metaphors which appear in one particular application become popular with its users, we may often see it appearing in other applications. For example, after Flickr added “tag clouds” to its interface, they soon became a standard feature of numerous web sites. The appearance of particular techniques in applications can also be traced to the economics of software industry – for instance, when one software company buys another company, it may merge its existing package with the software from the company it bought.

All these software mutations and “new species” of software techniques are social in a sense that they don’t simply come from individual minds or from some “essential” properties of a digital computer or a computer network. They come from software developed by groups of people and marketed to large numbers of users.

In short, the techniques and the conventions of the computer meta-medium and all the tools available in software applications are not the result of a technological change from “analog” to “digital” media. They are the result of software which is constantly evolving and which is subject to market forces and constraints.

This means that the terms “digital media” and “new media” do not capture very well the uniqueness of the “digital revolution.” Why? Because the new qualities of “digital media” are not situated “inside” the media objects. Rather, they exist “outside” – as commands and techniques of media viewers, authoring software, animation, compositing and editing software, game engine software, wiki software, and all other software species. Thus, while digital representation enables computers to

work with images, text, forms, sounds and other media types in principle, it is the software which determines what we can do with them. So while we are indeed “being digital,” the actual forms of this “being” come from software.

Accepting the centrality of software puts into question a fundamental concept of modern aesthetic and media theory – that of “properties of a medium.” What does it mean to refer to a “digital medium” as having “properties”? For example, is it meaningful to talk about unique properties of digital photographs, or electronic texts, or web sites? Strictly speaking, it is not accurate. Different types of digital content – images, text files, 3D models, etc. – do not have any properties by themselves. What as users we experience as properties of media content comes from software used to create, edit, present and access this content.

It is important to make clear that I am not saying that today all the differences between different media types – continuous tone images, vector images, ASCII text, formatted text, 3D models, animations, video, maps, sound, etc. – are completely determined by application software. Obviously, these media types have different representational and expressive capabilities; they can produce different emotional effects; they are processed by different groups and networks of neurons; and they also likely correspond to different types of mental processes and mental representations. These differences have been discussed for thousands of years – from ancient philosophy to classical aesthetic theory to modern art to contemporary neuroscience. What I am arguing is something else. On the one hand, interactive software adds a new set of capabilities shared by all these media types: editing by selecting discrete parts, separation between data structure and its display, hyperlinking, visualization, searchability, findability, etc. On the other hand, when we are dealing with a particular digital cultural object, its “properties” can vary dramatically depending on the software application which we use to interact with this object.

Let’s look at one example – a photograph. In the analog era, once a photograph was printed, whatever this photograph represented/expressed was contained in this print. Looking at this photograph at home or in

an exhibition did not make any difference. Certainly, a photographer could produce a different print with a higher contrast – but the result was a physically different object, i.e. a new photographic print.

Now, let’s see what happens with a digital photograph. We can take a photo with a digital camera or a mobile phone, or scan it from an old magazine – no matter how. In every case, we end with a file containing an array of pixels which hold color (or gray scale) information and a header which may specify image dimensions, information about the camera and shot conditions (such as exposure), and other metadata. In other words, we end up with what is normally called “digital media” – a file containing numbers that mean something.

However, unless you are a programmer, you never directly deal with these numbers – instead, you interact with digital media files through some software. And depending on which software you use, what you can do with one and the same digital file can change dramatically. MMS software on your phone may simply display this photo – and nothing else. Free media viewers/players which run on desktops or over the web usually give you more functions. For instance, a desktop version of Google’s Picassa 3.0 (2009) includes crop, auto color, red eye reduction, variety of filters (soft focus, glow etc.) and a number of other functions. It can also display the same photo as color or black and white without any changes to the file itself. It also allows me to zoom into the photo many times examining its details in ways that my mobile phone software cannot. Finally, if I open the same photo in Photoshop CS4, I can do even more. I can instruct Photoshop to automatically replace some colors in a photo with others, make visible its linear structure by running edge detection filters, blur it in a dozen of different ways, etc. In short, depending on the software I am using, the “properties” of a media object can change dramatically.

To summarize this discussion: there is no such thing as “digital media”. There is only software – as applied to media (or “content”). To put this differently: for users who can only interact with media content through application software, “digital media” does not have any unique property by itself. What used to be “properties of a medium” are now operations and affordances defined by software.

Arjen Mulder

Arjen Mulder is an essayist and media theorist based in Amsterdam. Mulder has taught at various art schools in the Netherlands and Belgium. He has published four collections of essays in Dutch and co-wrote ***Book for the Electronic Arts*** (2000) with Maaïke Post. Mulder is Winner of the Media.art research award (Ars Electronica), 2008.

In the age of globalization, everyone is an anthropologist. If you walk through any of the major cities in the West you'll meet people from more nationalities, communities, clans, tribes and extended families than any anthropologist in the 19th or early 20th century ever came across during his adventurous trips to remote places in Sub-Saharan Africa, Mid-Asia or Amazonia. Anthropology has become the dominant way of relating to the people that co-inhabit the city with you. The exotics live among us, are actually having a good time here, but remain as exotic as ever, even in a coercive political climate demanding "integration of allochthonous people" and using racist slogans like "stop immigration, our country is full". Immigration won't stop, not in this century at least, and the great post-colonial worldwide wandering of groups and individuals will continue until everybody is a stranger to everybody around them. We are way beyond tourism, since there is no return home; even if we stay at home everything keeps changing around us and in us all the time, because the world is brought into all houses via our information and communication media. Everybody is forced to explain themselves to everybody else continuously, forgetting who they are themselves in the process. Everybody sees that everyone else is doing things differently. The "primitives" study the "civilized" researchers as much as they themselves are being studied by them. Who is who anyway? In a global network society, anthropology is more than a method of studying foreign peoples or collecting funny objects: it is the dominant way of being.

Cultural anthropology used to study sacred and profane artworks of other peoples under denominators such as "fetish", "totem" and "material culture". Nowadays

artistic anthropology studies the normality of one's own people under secular and holy denominators such as "interactive art", "participation art" or even "collective art" (that is, the art of collectives). In relational aesthetics, the art is in the relations, whether these take the form of a conversation, a meeting or a shared project. In anthropological aesthetics, the art is in the interaction, the participation, the collective. The only valid definition of art in this new paradigm is when an individual or a group of persons say, "What we do is art." That makes it art, and then the conversation can start about craftsmanship, conceptual richness, developmental possibilities. There are no critics left to judge this art from the outside, because to understand or empathize with the art of anthropological aesthetics, you have to become part of the artwork, you have to join in and interact, participate, share, that is suspend any critical distance, leave the ego behind, and enter the "we" of the network. As soon as you leave the artwork the art is gone again, hardly a memory, maybe just a sense of an experience beyond words and beyond media that you once had and have lost. You can talk about it, like mystics talk about their (re)union with God, but like them you know that everything you say is beside the point. The experience is too material and physical to be translated in spiritual media such as language, image or sound. Maybe touch-media could do the trick, if they existed, for touch is never abstract or transcendental but always immanent, bodily, native.

So, what kind of art are we talking about? I'll give you just one example and you can figure out the rest for yourself. This specific project started with a map that was drawn in real time by a few of the inhabitants of Amsterdam moving through their city, on foot, bicycle, public transport or car. Every few seconds their GPS-signal was uploaded via a sort of mobile phone system to a central computer, that visualized these data as dots that lasted for minutes or hours on a black screen and formed lines: vectors of movements. On a single day there were usually some thirty participants involved in the project, which lasted for a couple of weeks, and together they created or designed, hour after hour, day after day, a live map of how the city was being used by its inhabitants. The interactive map was on display in the

Amsterdam City Archive. **Amsterdam realtime** (2002) by Esther Polak and Jeroen Kee is a classic of interactive art. It is anthropological at its most basic level: it shows the different uses of interactions within a given context by a local population. It visualizes what Arjun Appadurai calls “the production of locality”, that is the “series of links between the sense of social immediacy, the technologies of interactivity, and the relativity of contexts” that give value to what otherwise would have remained just a “neighborhood” - the sort of thing one can read from a printed map. The map of Esther Polak and Jeroen Kee was a collective effort produced in real time by participants that were interacting both with the technological system of GPS/phone/central storage computer/visualization software/screen, with the streets of the city, with each other, and with the viewers of the map in the Amsterdam City Archive. Because they knew they were being watched, they sometimes planned special routes through the city so as to produce a beautiful drawing on the map -that was printed every now and then.

For Esther Polak the next step in this project was to take the GPS-system and attach it, not to people, but to a product: milk, as it moved through places. The first version of **NomadicMilk** (2006-2008) showed how streams of milk move every day through Northern Europe: from cows in Lithuania via trucks through Germany to milk factories in Holland and on to supermarkets in various countries. The second version (2009-2010) comes from Nigeria and follows an industrial stream of powder milk going from the harbor of Lagos to Aboudja in the interior (in 2 days), and a nomadic stream of milk from cows that wander about with their Fulani shepherd in the course of a year in a large area not far from Aboudja. This again is anthropology at its most basic: production and distribution of a resource in connection to two different local customs and traditions. This work is presented to the participants with a clever printer-robot that can produce the routes they have followed in sand on any flat surface. And then they start to tell stories about what happened, where along the way, and why they took certain routes. This is filmed and shown to audiences in the West in the form of an installation.

Esther Polak is a painter by training, and the lines that are being produced by her GPS-medium have

a quality that all painters dream of: every point on the lines it produces has a meaning, a decision behind it. I noticed it is very difficult for Polak to avoid the seduction of producing ever more meaningful lines and patterns, just for art’s sake, to create beauty really. She doesn’t even care that much about milk as a life giving substance. Considered as painting, her GPS art provides a nice contemporary commentary to art history. Considered as anthropological aesthetics it gives much more. The way Polak uses her GPS-system turns it into a story producing device, creating empathy, involvement, friendship even. The stories are not the end goal of the project, friendship is: that connection beyond words that abolishes our alienation without removing any of our exoticness. You don’t understand what these others are doing, you just see them move, but you get totally interested in them, in the ways they use their world, in their ways of worldmaking. That’s what artistic anthropology is all about. It’s about more than just art, it’s about you and me and everybody else, trying to live and produce locality on a huge and vastly overpopulated planet.

<http://www.nomadicmilk.net>



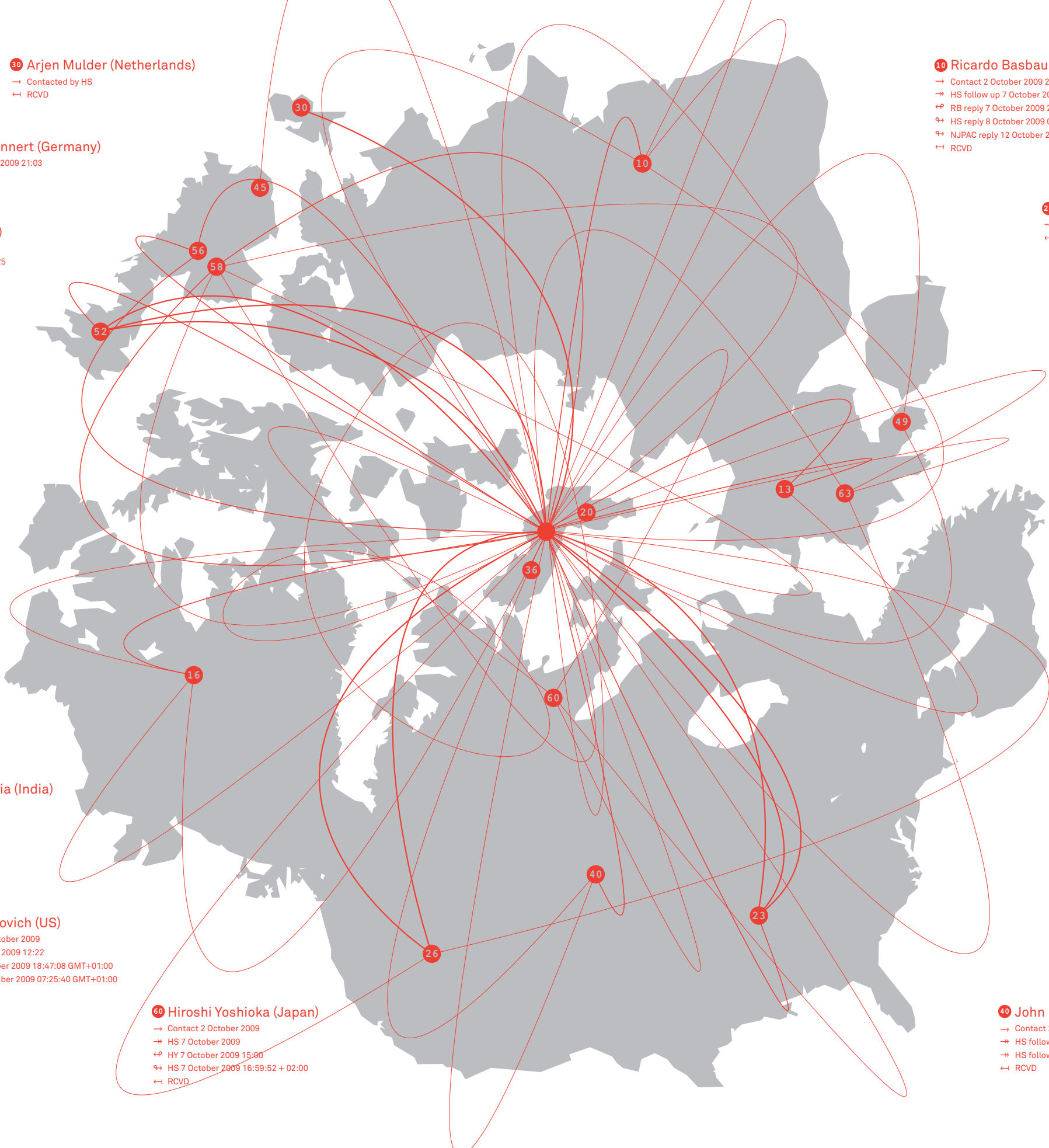
Performance at the Geography department of the Bayero University Kano



Workshop with Mr. Idiris on rainy season route



Images courtesy of **NomadicMILK** project; Esther Polak, 2009 Nigeria



30 Arjen Mulder (Netherlands)
→ Contacted by HS
← RCVD

45 Suzanne Rennert (Germany)
→ Contact 2 October 2009 21:03
← RCVD

56 Peter Weibel (Germany)
→ Contact 2 October 2009 21:13
→ NJPAC follow up 9 October 2009 17:25
↔ NJPAC reply to phone confirmation
from AG 14 October 2009 16:45
← RCVD

52 Simon O’Sullivan (UK)
→ Contact 14 October 2009 17:27
→ NJPAC follow up 19 October 2009 20:51
↔ SO’S reply 20 October 2009 03:49
↔ NJPAC reply 20 October 2009 18:48
← RCVD

58 Haegue Yang (Korea) Berlin based
→ Contact 2 October 2009 20:22
↔ HY reply 5 October 2009 04:56
↔ HS reply 5 October 2009 05:12
↔ NJPAC reply 5 October 2009 11:24
↔ HY question 9 October 2009 09:03
↔ NJPAC reply 9 October 2009 10:01
← RCVD

36 Wongil Park (Korea)
→ Via phone
← RCVD

16 Ranjit Hoskote + Nancy Adajania (India)
→ Contact 2 October 2009 20:53
↔ Reply 5 October 2009 20:02
↔ HS reply 5 October 2009 20:07
↔ RH reply 11 October 2009 16:17
← RCVD

26 Lev Manovich (US)
→ Contact 2 October 2009
→ HS 7 October 2009 12:22
↔ LM 6 November 2009 18:47:08 GMT+01:00
↔ LM 25 November 2009 07:25:40 GMT+01:00
← RCVD

60 Hiroshi Yoshioka (Japan)
→ Contact 2 October 2009
→ HS 7 October 2009
↔ HY 7 October 2009 15:00
↔ HS 7 October 2009 16:59:52 + 02:00
← RCVD

10 Ricardo Basbaum (Brasil)
→ Contact 2 October 2009 20:56
→ HS follow up 7 October 2009 17:21
↔ RB reply 7 October 2009 22:53
↔ HS reply 8 October 2009 00:04
↔ NJPAC reply 12 October 2009 11:33
← RCVD

20 Jeonghwan Jo (Korea)
→ Via phone
← RCVD

49 Kiss-Pál Szabolcs (Hungary)
→ Contact 2 October 2009 21:09
↔ KPS reply 5 October 2009 18:03
↔ HS reply 7 October 2009 15:38
← RCVD

13 Jean Paul Fargier (France)
→ Contact 8 October 2009 17:40
↔ JPF reply 9 October 2009 02:28 NJPAC reply
↔ 9 October 2009 13:38
← RCVD

63 David Zerbib (France)
→ Contact 2 October 2009 20:11
↔ DZ reply 3 October 2009 07:37 NJPAC
↔ Reply 5 October 2009 09:51 DZ reply 6
October 2009 00:09
← RCVD

23 Clara Kim (US)
→ Contact 13 October 2009 16:32
→ NJPAC follow up 16 October 2009 17:33
↔ CK reply 16 October 2009 23:06
↔ NJPAC reply 17 October 2009 00:33
← RCVD

40 John Rajchman (US)
→ Contact 2 October 2009 20:38
→ HS follow up 7 October 2009 17:22
→ HS follow up 11 October 2009 15:00
← RCVD

Wongil Park

Wongil Park was a professor of Anthropology at Korea University where he majored in Mongolian studies. Park is the author of several books on Mongolian history and culture, as well as shamanism.

Nam June Paik opened a new world of art through his exhibition with the unique name **Exposition of Music-Electronic Television** at the Parnass Gallery in Wuppertal, Germany, in 1963. In this exhibition, he hung the fresh head of a cow, dripping blood. According to Paik, for his performance, he took the form of “Daegamgut”, which is a Korean traditional exorcism through which people wish fortune to the house guardian deity. However, Paik’s brutal and weird performance in a wealthy area in Germany was stopped by the police because of the neighbor’s complaint, and the cow’s head was buried under the ground. Nam June Paik called himself, **Yellow Peril, C’est Moi!**, which means “I am the yellow peril”, in a letter to Maciunas one year before the performance.

As if his statement was an omen of peril, the gallery, with a 16-year history, closed down two years after Paik’s exhibition. The gallery owner, Rolf Jährling, sometimes joked, “the gallery was closed down through Nam June Paik’s exhibition”. Actually, during Paik’s exhibition, besides the cow’s head dripping blood, other violent and scary scenes also turned the gallery, once a family home, into “a haunted house”. This method of using psychological fear is close to the Mongolian custom in the 12th century to scare enemies at the start of war. Nam June Paik’s calling himself “the yellow peril” is not a metaphor or a symbol, but an expression of his awareness of his very impulsive and destructive performances.

Paik also used the notion “the blue sky” during his performances. This is another important indicative notion to show his awareness of being a “yellow peril”. “The blue sky” refers to an old immutable belief system of Northern nomadic people. Mongolian grasslands, shamans’ battlefield, was a space for a pledge under “the blue sky” and a land of countless betrayals. Nam June Paik’s statement makes us shudder like ancient people did when they heard “with the eternal power of heaven,

people from the sun rising place to the sun setting place surrender to me” as Genghis Khan or his descendants from the ancient Mongol empire once proclaimed. In other words, “by using somebody’s great experiments and the old art in totally different methods, I have created new art. In the future, everyone will use the method that I found and used, and they will make their own creative art with it. Video art is very different from traditional art. Create your own art without hesitation”.

How can we understand Paik’s art world better? Gilles Deleuze’s **A Thousand Plateaus** provides a spiritual guide and a supporting philosophy for the 21st century. One of the chapters - or one of the thousand plateaus - Deleuze creates is “1227: Treatise on Nomadology: - The War Machine”. 1227 is the year when Genghis Khan died during a war. It seems very natural to talk about Nam June Paik as an artist in the 21st century who represents the Eurasia grasslands, and ethnic people’s war machine, since Nam June Paik who wished the world to become “Teletopia” always kept the wild plain of grassland in mind.

It is not possible that any genius can be understood historically while being alive, thus, Nam June Paik explained many times that his ideas and the nature of his artworks are rooted in shamanism and the Northern culture. In other words, his art world and his video art were neither a sudden outburst nor an outcome of a rational decision. Clearly, Northern Eurasia grasslands’ mythology and philosophy in Paik’s subconsciousness provoked an unexpected artistic sensitivity in 1963.

Northern nomadic shamanism as a system to understand natural law is still an area of knowledge not widely understood. It is almost impossible to grasp the facts of shamanism because it has been oppressed, effaced, ignored, and distorted. Today, shamanism needs to be reconstructed and revitalized by a collaboration of philosophy, mythology, archeology, anthropology, astronomy, geography, linguistics, and art. Gilles Deleuze’s study of nomadism is a successful philosophic example. An artistic anthropology might be another useful method to find a path to the essence of shamanism.

Historically, Northern nomadic ethnic groups are based on shamanism and harmoniously merge with it. They have seriously studied economy, the separation

of powers in politics, new weapons in science, and symbols of light (blue sky) in art. In fact, the Eurasia grasslands are a place where wolves wail, god's wind blows, and blood and tears flow. There is no peace after peace; there is only danger after danger in this natural environment and history. In the Eurasia grasslands, survival depends on how fast one can access information and scientific technologies. In that respect, information and communication are like a light in the blue sky. The Northern ethnic groups respect the speed of light, and this philosophy of light is part of shamanism.

How are information and communication presented in Paik's art world? Nam June Paik once created an iconic artwork called ***Moon is the Oldest TV***. In fact, the moon is the oldest mirror for every being on earth even before human beings' existence. After humans came into being, the moon became a mirror for shamans among the Eurasia grasslands and its ethnic groups. Shamans in Manchuria call shaman's mirrors "panaptu, soul's shadow to see the world". Thus, there is no time but only space in the moon; it connects "land without night" and "land without dawn" like light does; it is the soul's mirror. That implies that today's media are like a soul's mirror transformed to daylight. One could say that the old moon, once shaman's mirror, eventually emerged as a medium in modern time. This analogy explains Paik's conception of media. Paik said, "medium is a concept from medieval theology indicating a method and a medium of communication with god." Etymologically, "gut", meaning exorcism, originates from a Mongolian word meaning "spirit". Therefore, media and "gut" have the same meaning. "Gut" is a skill to enjoy shadow and "medium" is a skill to enjoy "brightness". Thus, media, a core concept in Paik's work, is a mirror that helps communication like the old moon did.

Historically, Northern nomadic ethnic people value information and communication above anything else in performing religious services. Harmony and union are the bases for better communication and information. In order to have harmony and union, we need to be aware that all civilizations and cultures are equal. In the great Mongol empire, based on shamanism, that awareness was greatly practiced. The great Mongol empire was the only country without religious problems, since it clung to



Nam June Paik
Beuys and Shaman, 1991 (still image).
Nam June Paik Art Center Collection



Nam June Paik
Bye Bye Kipling, 1986 (still image).
Nam June Paik Art Center Collection



Blue Lake, Mongolia.
Photo by Youngchul Lee

the notion of "Pax-Mongolica" creating a mix of cultures in an open society.

One of Nam June Paik's works, ***The Moon on a Thousand Rivers*** could be considered an epitaph composed of many languages: various languages spoken all over the world are reflecting moon light on a thousand rivers like old mirrors. In Nam June Paik's exhibition ***From Seoul to Budapest*** (1991), he showed Eurasia's great path, a route from his place of birth, and the electronic super highway. He also exhibited a robot called Genghis Khan, an ancient horse riding man, Marco Polo, in ***From Venice to Ulan Bator*** at the 1993 Venice Biennial. In his works, Paik tried to show a historical period of time when shamanistic ethnic groups practiced a philosophy of harmony and union called "Jamchi", a metaphor of the speed of light awakening the human soul and creating a real global village. In Paik's early artworks, he already shows that video art has the power to construct a philosophy. ***Good Morning Mr. Orwell*** (1984) seems to be a message to proclaim a new age.

Paik's work reminds us of the shaman of the Eurasian grasslands. The shaman created a spiritual crisis by tragic greatness and beauty and, thus, gave a new life to people. Perhaps Paik wanted to create a novel life for all human beings and cultures through the role he played as an artist. If we want to travel through Paik's art world, we need to do so by opening various doors to and conducting various forms of analyses on his work.

John Rajchman

John Rajchman is a philosopher working in the areas of art history, architecture, and continental philosophy. Rajchman is Associate Professor and Director of Modern Art M.A. Programs in the Department of Art History and Archaeology at Columbia University. He has previously taught at Princeton University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Collège International de Philosophie in Paris, and The Cooper Union, among others. He published *The Deleuze Connections* in 2000.

Nam June Paik (NJP) left an intricate oeuvre, composed of many entangled lines, a complicated legacy, crossing across divisions of performance - music - art, Asia and Europe, reaching into the present. In these short questionnaire answers, I would like to start to unravel just two lines intersecting with one another in unfinished ways yet to be determined. Each corresponds to a current theoretical question - What is a dispositif? What is Contemporary? – which together call for new spaces of art history.

With the new Porta-pack, in 1961, NJP invented a new *dispositif*, a new arrangement of space and time, a new relation of subjectivity, movement, image, a new way of thinking in art. Pre-digital, pre-net, it seemed to emerge within a new galaxy after Guttenberg, which it helped to make visible, and carry on a new battle with broadcast television and its controlled, passive public, for which it sought alternatives. Installation, monitors, feedback, new ways of seeing and being seen, a new kind of interactivity or participation – at the same time, it formed part of a larger constellation of art and thought in New York spreading out to many other practices. It came at a heady moment. Soon there would be other uses of Porta-pack and its successors and video art would come to mean other things.

But what is a dispositif? An arrangement, a disposition of space and time in which we ourselves figure, into which we are plunged with body and brain. As more generally linked with what Deleuze called *agencements* (assemblages), such dispositions are prior to the divisions between subject and object, and

the space-times they construct are prior to distinctions between artifice and nature, organism and machine, thus opening up a new sense of ecology. But as artistic, creative things, Nam June Paik's New York dispositifs were also at the same time critical matter. Directed against a broadcast system as more centralized and more limited than our networks, they were already concerned with information and information systems, already trying to interrupt their constituted or controlled circuits. Television was then more than a media; a kind of power distribution which constituted a public, whose eyes needed to be artistically arrested and recast. But what is the relation of visual "dispositifs" with the creative, critical acts and related processes of subjectivization involved with such re-casting of what we can see?

What is a dispositif? More than twenty years ago, Deleuze asked this question and found one answer in Foucault. A dispositif is a specific determination of seeing, saying, acting – what Jacques Rancière would later call a "distribution of the sensible" - a determination of *who* sees and speaks, what part they have, which itself is unseen yet not hidden. It is through acts of creation that such determinations themselves become visible - critical acts and corresponding processes of subjectivization, acts of emancipation or disidentification with the parts we come to play in them. Finding the idea in Foucault, Deleuze worked it out for cinema and its time-images. Cinema is a complex dispositif, which helps change our idea of art and the role of time and movement in it; a great laboratory for new ways of thinking later to discover new uses in our post-cinematic digital situation.

A dispositif is thus not exactly what Jean Baudry had called an apparatus, even if it also goes back to Marx and those critical acts that help interrupt and transform the apparatuses of production and reception. Painting is already itself a dispositif and not a purifiable medium, which in turn intersects and overlaps with new questions of time and movement introduced by cinema. That is why it is so misleading to talk of a post-medium condition. The whole idea of medium-specificity and related art-narrative of abstraction must be rethought. Painting is more than a canvas with (or without) figures or stories; it is a violent form of thinking, using blocks of lines and colors, passing through the violence of a potential

collapse in visual coordinates, and so linked to cognate processes in sculpture or urban intervention. White canvas, picture frame and easel is only one disposition of painting. In pre-modern Asian hand-scrolls, we already find another, closer to cinema, just as ancient calligraphy is already performance or action in painting, a search for vital energizing marks. But what then is the history of dispositifs? What relation do they have to art-historical narratives – for example, the all-too-familiar stories of modernism or postmodernism?

A dispositif is more than a mechanism or apparatus and yet it belongs to the history of technologies, and in particular, to the history of the relation of technologies to the “work” in art and of art. Nam June Paik’s invention matches with the rise of information machines in this history, their role in labor as in leisure. For the idea of machine or machinic arrangement within larger socio-technical arrangements, Deleuze and Guattari looked back to Dada – to Kurt Schwitters, Merzbau, cut-and-connect, strange machines of dispositifs of art invented in the wake of World War I. Their picture of the work of the unconscious, or its fabrications, was rather neo-Dada, almost Fluxus, posed in contrast to the dirty priest or disabused aristocrat or sovereign of the transgressive unconscious, and its Law of Profanation, to be found in Lacan or Bataille.

When after World War II and in its wake there arose a new phylum of machines, forming part of a larger shift from carbon to silicon, industrial to post-industrial, there arose new kinds of informational dispositifs, and the new problem of what William Burroughs would call control of its environmental viruses. How then did his cut-up work disconnect from given circuits re-distributing the sensible along other lines? There are many relations with Burroughs and Fluxus and indeed one might imagine Nam June Paik’s arriving in New York, via Japan, Germany, electronic music and Cage as part of it. We thus come to my second question – what is contemporary? What does it have to do with modernity or modernism - and therefore postmodernism?

Nam June Paik’s invention formed part of a larger constellation in New York in the 1960s, when “contemporary” already acquired a new sense in contrast to “modern” or “modernist” art or the related notion

of avant-garde. A new idea of art arose, casting off from earlier presuppositions and institutions. It was a critical juncture, a moment that would re-distribute art-historical narratives and models of criticism. Freed from the traditional aegis of the model of painting, visual art no longer had to be made in a studio or shown in a white cube; it discovered instead new relations with body and brain, everyday life and information, mass or pop images, and with it, new kinds of participation, new relations with sound or music, theater, performance. Expanding its fields and its very idea, visual art and art institutions became a vital zone of experimentation and transformation, without exact equivalent in modernist literature or even cinema. But today this contemporary moment in visual art has itself again fallen back into an art-historical narrative, the objects of many revivals or returns, and the question of what is contemporary is posed anew.

What is contemporary?, we ask again today. There is a desire to get away from the old story of modernism followed by some sort of post, a desire for another kind of history, capable of including critical moments such as the one involved in Nam June Paik’s “invention” of video art. For that we need to make room for another kind of time – a stratigraphic time, in which earlier layers such as 1960s New York happenings or diagrammatic machines in the wake of World War I are superimposed on current spaces and forms of invention; a time where dates take the place of monolithic periods – 1989, for example, for our “contemporary” time marked at once by Berlin and Beijing. After that date, a key presupposition for the idea of the contemporary in visual art becomes a notion of the global in which Asian art would play a key role. New York is no longer the key center it had become in the wake of World War II, no longer the crucible of a new idea of art. Europe-America no longer monopolizes the art-historical narrative and must instead invent new roles within the shifting global geographies. That is why the situation is unlike the problem Nam June Paik was working with – back in a time of broadcast television and its global village, even one re-united by travel along the information superhighway. The question has become instead one of the role of critical thought and art, in relation to the globalization of technical knowledge and a clash of cultural or artistic interpretations, as a new arena for

critical moments and corresponding stratigraphic dates, overlapping exchanges and connections. It is a matter of a trans-nationality in this arena and its new zones and territories - in what is called “Asian” in old Europe. That is what makes the contemporary moment a new juncture like that of Nam June Paik in 1960s New York, and that is why it can no longer be content with the story of European modernism followed by the crux of their various posts. For the history of dispositifs and related acts of creation only intersects with art history at new junctures when new ways of thinking arise in art.

In this context, Nam June Paik’s peculiar itinerary now matters in new ways. Following World War I, with its entrenched, mechanized European theater (and in conditions that would lead to World War II), Dada was already transnational, moving across borders, working through new kinds of international groups. Later, with neo-Dada or Fluxus, we find other geographies, some already Asian, as with the fate of electronic music and Cage in Japan and Germany, through which Nam June Paik passed in making his way from Korea to New York. But today a similar voyage is no longer possible; the geographies of creation have shifted. We are no longer even in a time of questioning the nomadic or exilic that reemerged in the wake of 1989 or of global curators travelling to locales they didn’t know much about presenting work to a global biennial public who knew even less. More like the old modernity of 19th-century Europe, it is a matter of cities and the ways they offer zones for critical exchange and experimentation. It is a time of new global centers in discussion with and invention of art. Will they now offer the space for those crucial moments, which come from art-history, fall back into it, and yet are not of it - critical times when new “thinking in art” arises, appealing to peoples who are lacking and who do not yet exist? For no form of expertise, no method of interpretation or translation can take their place; and no politics can do without them.

And that is why, for the intertwined questions of What is a dispositif? and What is contemporary?, the work of Nam June Paik remains so alive for us today, opening his legacy to those new questions and thinking without which we in fact inherit nothing.

Susanne Rennert

Susanne Rennert is an art historian and curator based in Dusseldorf. Currently, Rennert is working on a book on Jean-Pierre Wilhelm and Gallery 22 in Düsseldorf where Nam June Paik first showed his *Hommage à John Cage* (1959). Additionally, Rennert is working on several curatorial projects including the Nam June Paik-Retrospective (together with Sook-Kyung Lee, Liverpool) to open at museum kunst palast, Düsseldorf and Tate Liverpool in 2010.

“If you play a game and you don’t know the rule of the game you cannot play the game”. _ Nam June Paik

1

I like the work of the Rumanian artist Dan Perjovschi who transforms drawing into information and political commentary. His ironic and sharp comments on economy and socio-cultural structures show an interesting way to leave the narrow, market-determined art space and to find new (old) direct ways of communicating in a world (through the Internet/email) of highly accelerated communication processes – which destroy communication somehow.

Other contemporary artists who like Dan Perjovschi go beyond the framework of Nicolas Bourriaud’s “relational aesthetics” are Yael Bartana, Danica Dakic, Haegue Yang, or Ceal Floyer. Brigitte Franzen showed a remarkable exhibition at “Ludwig Forum für internationale Kunst” in Aachen this spring, where she combined works from the permanent collection – among them Paik, Beuys and Warhol – with contemporary positions – including the named artists except Ceal Floyer.

Yael Bartana’s film *Summer Camp*, for example, documents the (now deconstructed) reconstruction of a destroyed house near Jerusalem by members of the fourth “Summer Camp” of the “Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions” in July 2006. But the documentary character of the film is interlaced with music and editing styles derived from Zionist propaganda films of the 1930s

and 1940s and their glorification of the depicted. Thus, **Summer Camp** shows very intensely the tragedy and absurdness of political reality in Israel.

In **Construction**, Ceal Floyer, whose conceptual-minimalist works often resist a “material” level, makes a vast exhibition space be sounded and defined by construction work noise. In her work **Ink on Paper**, she lets felt markers bleed on paper and displays them arranged by color on the wall.

2

I have always been interested in Paik as a philosopher and conceptual artist. - He got a lot of conceptual input through Fluxus in the early 1960s. - But his conceptual and philosophical side is still overlaid by the fast cuts of his colorful, kaleidoscopic videotapes. This is what the general public associates with Paik. Today, the image of Nam June Paik as video artist and charismatic father of media art is dominant and the hardware-laden video installations, walls and sculptures are at the center of attention of the art public.

Our Paik retrospective – a collaboration of Tate Liverpool (Sook-Kyung Lee) and museum kunst palast, Düsseldorf – which is due in 2010 – will prove how Paik combined seemingly contradictory elements and expanded the boundaries of art on multiple levels, destroying and breaking them down, constantly initiating “new states of consciousness” (Mary Bauermeister). In each of his works, Paik clearly demonstrates on many levels how critical consciousness can be materialized, regardless whether it is music, Fluxus, action, performance, video, (media-) sculpture or drawing. The freedom he used to link different points of views, the liberty he demonstrated when dealing with medium, material and technique is highly inventive. On the leaflet accompanying the invitation poster to his legendary first exposition **Exposition of Music – Electronic Television** in 1963 at Parnass Gallery in Wuppertal, he used the words EXISTENTIA IS ESSENTIA, to unite thoughts derived from Heidegger, Sartre, Montaigne, Cage, Laotse, Chen-Chu and others and to yield an inspiring collage of ideas. In an introductory text in the same leaflet, Jean-Pierre Wilhelm - the early mentor, who had discovered Paik - wrote about

his dialectical method “in one stroke, everything fits together.”

“The basic idea for museum kunst palast is to give the large and high space to the large and most impressive works. The height of the space will allow to create an emotional display of the art works. Within this display, the chronological or semantic order has to step behind. The second space which has a lower ceiling will display works and documents. In this space, we categorized the works as “Music and Action Music”, “Fluxus”, “Exposition of Music – Electronic Television”, “24 hours”, “Paik and Moorman”, “Paik and Beuys” and finally “Robots”. In order to take advantage of the given architecture in Düsseldorf, the chronology will be reversed for the second space. Visitors walk through the “Robots” into the historical sections. Rarely or never seen documents and photographs will take a major part in the presentation of the early sections of the exhibition. We believe that this way of composing the show will guide the visitor from the large and very colorful works to the detailed and more ephemeral documents – in order to understand the importance of Paik's philosophy and conceptual basis.” (Susanne Rennert)

3

In 1996 Stephan von Wiese and I curated the show **Mixed Pixels, Students of Paik, 1978-95** at former Kunstmuseum – today's museum kunst palast, Düsseldorf - on the occasion of Paik's retirement from the Düsseldorf Art Academy. For the catalogue we wanted to interview him about his experience as a Video Art teacher (1979-95). He proposed to meet at a restaurant in Düsseldorf's main station. (This was my second interview with Paik – the first one together with René Block in 1992, mainly about Joseph Beuys and Addi Koppcke.) In this second conversation he spoke about teaching and not teaching, EXISTENTIA AND ESSENTIA – and about the art market.

Paik said, “I think I constantly ridiculed all art museums and curators, gallerists, art snobs, in order to become a successful artist. Because there is no fair play in the art world. There are no objective criteria in the art world. If you play a game and you don't know the rule of the game you cannot play the game. But in the art world

you can always change the rule of the game over night. If you are about to lose your game you can change the rules. I just speak of art politics. It is not anything you can read in art magazines. Don't buy art magazines. That makes you crazy. You have the ideal to become Bob Morris, but it is impossible. I never looked in art magazines because they are too expensive and all game is set. (...) One of my teaching philosophies is: The most important thing about art is not to become a bartender, a waitress or a taxi driver. Although, being a bartender is, I think, a very interesting job, since it is about performance and communication.”



Photos of Nam June Paik's Performance of *Hommage à Jean-Pierre Wilhelm* by Manfred Leve, 1978.
Nam June Paik Art Center Collection

KissPál Szabolcs

KissPál Szabolcs lives and works in Budapest. Szabolcs develops a computer-based installation and performance practice where an “intermedial” approach towards the elements of the work, including the use of technical and electronic images, pursues an inductive rather than generative methodology.

Over the past decade, both in my artistic practice and in my teaching, I have been closely involved with the phenomenon called “media art”. Although I find it a rather problematic concept challenged even by a number of theorists, it denotes a very important field of contemporary culture based on a tradition influenced decisively by Nam June Paik. However, in the last couple of years a narrow but deep schism has appeared within the historiography of this new field as its traditions and origins are interpreted in two major ways. One places the emphasis on the issues of perception understood as a psychophysical process. This is what Lev Manovich calls the historicizing approach towards media art history. The other aims at contextualizing it as a socially determined process carrying the potential of a deep impact not only on our contemporary visual culture but also on social processes. From this latter perspective – called pragmatistical approach by Manovich – the usage of media and communication networks as well as of the “new media” is interpreted as a channel through which contemporary society is shaped by various historical forces.

Although the two interpretations exist in parallel, they deal with two different definitions of subjectivity. One conceives of it as a rather apolitical entity delimited by its own senses in relation to the world, the other thinks of it as of an individual subjected to social interactions in relation to his work as the basic human activity and in a situation of dependence on power. In both cases, the issue of participation comes into the foreground, although with different connotations. In the first case, we can speak about a *user*, in the second about an *individual*.

It is not by chance that the Fluxus movement has a highlighted importance in this second historical

narrative due to its transitory position between art and life. The turning point represented by this movement is also mentioned by Bourriaud's relational aesthetics in close relation to the concept of participation. But while he considers the connectivity induced by the communication networks a plain transition from the society of spectacle to the society of statistics, the act of participation is attributed to a subject understood as a **viewer**.

In spite of their technological traits, Nam June Paik's experimentalism and attitude towards media objects deals with a different kind of subject. I think one of the most important contributions Nam June Paik has made to contemporary art is the modification of art's attitude towards its technically changing environment, which is shaped by a fast and dramatic process. The impact of his artistic attitude has come to influence our relationship towards technical devices not only as objects, but also as cultural and social phenomena. Instead of framing the viewer in aesthetical terms, Nam June Paik positions him/her rather as an **individual** who frees him/herself from the control of technology. To support this idea, I would only mention the Robot K-456, which in a performance of 1982 suffered a staged "accident" outside the Whitney Museum of American Art, thus creating not only a metaphor of the fragility of technology itself but also of the mankind depending on it. As this dependence **has** continuously been growing ever since its occurrence, the reformulation of the individual's integrity is necessary both in anthropological and social terms.

Even though his works are difficult to label as political since they lack explicit social connotations, Nam June Paik's oeuvre was to become the point of origin for several important fields of "media art". Many of these are based on the key notion of a social participation, such as the DIY (Do It Yourself) or tactical media. The DIY culture of the nineties, for instance, led at the end of the millennium to the DIWO (Do It With Others) culture, which achieved in my view a much more effective re-politicization of the gaps within the social tissue denoted by Bourriaud as **interstice** spaces. As brilliant examples belonging to the DIWO culture, several projects of the CAE (Critical Art Ensemble) are worth mentioning, first of all the **Free Range Grain** (2003-2004) project. The simple gesture of opening up the access of the individuals towards the field



Free Range Grain
Critical Art Ensemble with Beatriz da Costa and Shyh-shiun Shyu, at the Mass MoCA's *The Interventionists: Art in the Social Sphere* 2004-2005.
Image courtesy of Steve Kurtz



Nam June Paik,
A Tribute to John Cage, 1973(still image).
Nam June Paik Art Center Collection

of corporately owned and privatized knowledge (related to genetic modification) creates a new model of relationality in which the subject is no longer considered a viewer, but rather a social actor.

The same could be stated about the field of conceptual design, especially the projects arising from the MIT course led by Krzysztof Wodiczko in which design as activity forms a bridge between art, society and the individual. While Nam June Paik was "hacking" in the name of the Fluxus-freedom, the emblematic object of the 1970s, the television, Wodiczko's Interrogative Design Group forms and transforms the fetishistic technical devices of the present in the framework of a cultural anthropological discourse. Both of the two above-mentioned examples distance themselves not only from aesthetic categories in general, but also from the historically consensual concept of art in particular. As they adopt a rather activist approach which challenges the dominant paradigms of the established humanities, namely the human activity called art, and point into the direction of transforming it into applied anthropology. It is without doubt that by doing so a better and more political understanding of "human condition" might occur.

Due to the fact that anthropology itself embraces various aspects of human existence (biological, cultural, social, archaeological, linguistic, etc.), an artistic anthropology should first of all define its position among these. As the structuralist approach of conceptualism proved in many cases to be ignorantly ahistorical, the position most suitable for the present times might be a socio-cultural perspective with a strong emphasis on technical media as the main means through which actual relationality is shaped along with its intercultural aspects. Thus the specific qualities of the medium cannot be left unaccounted either in artistic or in technical sense. Therefore, artistic anthropology cannot be considered (solely) an act of communication, but also an act of knowledge production and dissemination that might lead in time to a radical change of the function of art.

Artistic anthropology in its applied form, on the one hand, and cultural activism on the other might become the major forms that art will be blending into in future times. In both cases, the heritage of Nam June Paik plays a crucial role.

Simon O’Sullivan

Simon O’Sullivan explores Guattari’s notion of ‘the production of subjectivity’. A Senior Lecturer in Art History/Visual Culture at Goldsmiths College in London, O’Sullivan writes and teaches on various contemporary art practices and on art theory in general. Additionally he has a collaborative art practice with David Burrows, under the name *Plastique Fantastique*.

1

Artistic anthropology intends to produce novel models of relationality and connectivity. Could (Nam June Paik’s legacy as a form of) artistic anthropology contribute to an artistic discourse going beyond the framework of “relational aesthetics”? Who are the artists in our day developing relevant examples of rethinking and recontextualizing an artistic anthropology?

A typical critique, increasingly made, of Nicolas Bourriaud’s relational aesthetics is that it substitutes a general model of “conviviality” for any criticality, or, more specifically, forms of dissent. My take on this (following Jean-Francois Lyotard) is that such dissent – which critiques of relational aesthetics take as the very *modus operandi* of a radical contemporary art practice – can be caught by the very thing they dissent from. They are forced to operate on the same terrain as their “enemy” and, as such, these forms of dissent can merely reproduce more of the same albeit dressed up as opposition.

A different take on Bourriaud might be to accelerate his concepts. For example, to articulate, following Spinoza, a kind of *super-conviviality* that is do with productive joyful encounters that occur when two or more things come together in a relationship of general agreement (this could be an art practice and participant, a collaboration, etc.). This is not to foreground a liberal ideology of consensus – Spinoza’s “joy” is not “happiness” in the sense of an individual ego-state or set of values – but it is to choose affirmation over negation and to understand the former as the basic building blocks for an ethical life and a political ontology – this being

the argument of Spinoza’s *Ethics* and his other more political writings. In passing, it is worth noting that Félix Guattari’s ecosophic paradigm, especially as it is mapped out in his future-orientated book, *Chaosmosis*, has much in common with Spinoza’s *Ethics* in that it moves precisely towards this expanded chemistry of subjectivity. “Artistic anthropology” as a name for “novel models” for thinking art practice would do well to attend to this more molecular “relationality and connectivity”, or what we might call simply a register of becoming. This is an ethico-aesthetic model for life as well as art – and for “life as a work of art” (as both Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze portrayed it). Another name for this, following Deleuze and Guattari, is schizoanalysis. Without doubt such practices are occurring all around us; equally without doubt the majority are invisible to an art world and market that trades on atomized and competitive individualism – however, this might be dressed up as “relational”, “participatory”, and so forth.

2

What could artistic anthropology mean for a current artistic practice? How could it relate to medium-specific qualities? Is it a form of artistic communication defined by a postmedium-condition? Or is it a practice that demands the concept of medium-specificity to change?

If “artistic anthropology” were to be understood in the terms laid out above then, to repeat the point above, life itself would become an art – or more generally an aesthetic practice. This is not, however, to deny other medium-specific practices which might well also be involved in this register of becoming (and this medium specificity will always take place in a “post-medium condition” that is today the general condition of art practice – a post-Duchampian condition we might say). A third point here is to affirm those practices that aspire to a kind of “total art” – following Olaf Fahlstrom’s term. Installation, and more particularly Performance, in its deployment of alternative and often non-sensical “narratives”, in its various technologies of bodily transformation and experimentation, and in

its more general exploration of different spaces and places, but also different **times** – especially of the event – would be such a practice of what we might call post-medium medium specificity - i.e. an expanded practice that moves towards the condition of life in general **but remains** art. It is perhaps worth remarking here that such practices are not to do with “communication”, or at least such communication is not their sole aim. Indeed, there is never anything, ultimately, to “understand” with such practices - nothing to “read” as it were. Often they operate on a register of affect, or intensity, that operates parallel to, but also interferes with more dominant coding and signifying systems - although this is not to elide the very real power art has in producing alternative signifying systems; this being art’s mythopoetic character. Is this collapsing of art into life anything more than a reassertion of the Modern claim that terminated with the Situationists? Perhaps one might think of it as working the other way around – of life collapsing into art – especially in the foregrounding of a general aesthetics of existence.

3

What could artistic anthropology - as a form of knowledge production - mean for the current classification system? Will it challenge the dominant paradigms of the established humanities and sciences? What type of new models might this trigger? How can artistic anthropology contribute to a better and more political understanding of the “human condition”? And what could artistic anthropology mean for the concept of art in general?

If “artistic anthropology” becomes just another form of “knowledge production” then it does, strictly speaking, nothing - except adding another category or classification for art, another marketing strategy. Art, when it truly is art, interrupts or literally ruptures this kind of knowledge. Indeed, it stymies our desire for knowledge - when this is understood as a desire for that which reassures ourselves of our subjectivity as it is already in place. This is why art can be bothersome, irritating, positioned as “irrelevant” and so forth. Art is,

we might say, ontologically **difficult** orientated as it is related to that which is yet to come. It is also why art’s “uselessness” is so important, allowing it to operate away from typical circuits of information and exchange - ideally at any rate. Art’s productivity comes from this specifically **non**-productive character. If “artistic anthropology” aspires to this more radical operation then it contributes more to a “post-human” condition than a human one - where “human” is always already defined and captured in a series of discursive and signifying formations (and a market) that thwarts creativity and experimentation. We might say then that art has at least two orientations. First, the “triggering of new models”, when these are not just more of the same, i.e. previous models that have merely been tweaked - and such new models, as suggested in my first answer above, might be taken from philosophers such as Spinoza and Guattari, both of whom have yet to have a sustained impact on the expanded field of contemporary art theory. And second, the breaking of models - and indeed the desire for **modeling** when the latter is also a desire for capture and classification - and for curating and careers. This is to suggest that art creates a world and breaks a world, and that these two always come together. Crucial here, however, is what one might call a general intention - or what Deleuze, following Nietzsche, called one’s style of life: whether one is drawn to affirmation or to negation. It seems to me that Nam June Paik’s practice was always led by affirmation, even joy - even when this resulted in dissent or refusal - and, as such, is amenable to “artistic anthropology” as I have attempted to articulate - or re-articulate - in my three responses to the questionnaire.

Peter Weibel

Peter Weibel, has been pursuing interdisciplinary activities within the scientific, artistic as well as literary, photographic, graphic, plastic, and digital fields since 1966. From 1999 Weibel has been chairman of the ZKM Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie in Karlsruhe where he lives and works.

1

As I have said at several occasions, as a media artist Nam June Paik is very akin to Marshal McLuhan's media theory. The core of his artistic anthropology could be related to two famous probes of McLuhan. The first one is, "The most human thing about us is our technology". Thus, Nam June Paik built his famous robot - **Robot K-456** (1965). He linked natural phenomena like water and its waves to electromagnetic waves - vide **Versaille Fountain** (1992). And he linked more or less natural candlelight to artificial electric light - he put a candle into an empty TV set - **Buddha** (1989). Nam June Paik continuously rethought, reframed and recontextualized the relations between nature, technology, and human beings. The basis of his model of relationality and connectivity was the natural sensory organization of human beings changed by technology. Again Nam June Paik followed a famous probe of McLuhan, "Each new technology is a reprogramming of sensory life". The order of our natural sensory life has been modified by technology. Especially the harmony between our senses of proximity (touch) and our senses of distance (vision) are disequilibrated. Our technology is built on machines and media enhancing and enforcing the senses of distance - tele means distant, far. Therefore, we have television, telephone, telefax – an expansion of sight, sound, and writing. Our technology is always tele-technology. Tele-technology reprograms our sensory life and, thus, our behavior in the environment.

Nam June Paik's anthropology defined technology as culture and culture as technology. Human beings are both the product of natural evolution and the parallel evolution of culture and technology. This goes

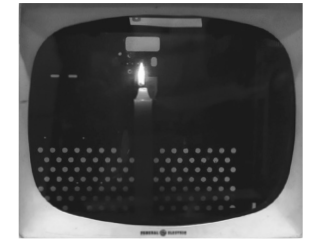
beyond the framework of what I have called in 1993 **Context Art**, the title of both an exhibition and a book, and what later in 1998 Nicolas Bourriaud called "relational aesthetics". The aesthetics of Nam June Paik was defined by the relations between nature, technology, and human beings, a true artistic anthropology.

2

The concept of artistic anthropology is not medium-specific, since it deals with technology and its relations to nature and human beings - not with media and their relations to nature and human beings. Artistic anthropology goes beyond the media discourse. It understands all forms and means of expression as media, starting with writing as a first medium, a first storage and technical carrier medium. Artistic anthropology has a universal medium concept. Everything is a medium, even your body, even your hand, even your brain. Your body is the first interface between yourself and the world. Your natural organs are your first interfaces to the world. Technology creates a man-made environment with artificial man-made interfaces to interact with the environment. In that sense, artistic anthropology is in a postmedium condition.

3

Artistic anthropology is anthropotechnology, is media-anthropology, an anthropology of universal media. In that sense, it is a challenge to the established humanities. Before the 19th century, art was considered a production of experts with the competence and craft to create paintings, sculptures and architecture, commissioned by the mundane or spiritual aristocracy and to be presented in castles and churches. Modern art is understood as an expression of the individual, of the inner self, without any commission. Artistic anthropology puts the content of modern art into question. If a work designs relations between technology, nature and human beings, it is not an expression of the self. Its type of research is more scientific and innovative. It questions the traditional concepts of humanity.



Nam June Paik
TV Candle, 1975(1999).
Nam June Paik Art Center Collection



Nam June Paik
TV Fish, 1975(1997).
Nam June Paik Art Center Collection



Nam June Paik
TV Garden, 1974(2008).
Nam June Paik Art Center Collection

Haegue Yang

Haegue Yang lives and works in Berlin and Seoul. In 2009, Yang represented the Republic of Korea at the 53rd Venice Biennale and presented *Haegue Yang: Integrity of the Insider* at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, USA. Other recent solo projects have taken place at Sala Rekalde, Bilbao; REDCAT, Los Angeles; and Portikus, Frankfurt.

The legacy of Nam June Paik continues to challenge art. Today, we think, imagine, and elaborate beyond what he has done, and this, directly and indirectly, is his achievement. For me, the most inspiring element of Nam June Paik is his “shapeless form” of reference manifested in his “singular” existence in a pre-globalized art world alongside his international career. In the context of an art-related discourse and the necessity to re-examine closely the complexity of today’s conception of medium-specificity, I believe that, in spite of a literal and even partially naive way of translating phenomena of life into an early video language, Nam June Paik’s complex work somehow survived and still fascinates through its vitality and its vivid voice.

In thinking about an artistic anthropology, I would like to introduce the notion of “unknown crowd” as a form of relation different from relational aesthetics’ “open crowd”. I do believe that many of my contemporaries are aware of how to imagine novel forms of “community” referring to unknown territories of the self as well as the other. Traditional definitions of anthropology refer to the holistic, global, comparative study of humans. Anthropology as an “holistic study” requires a complex perspective of multiple observations. Since the development of our society is to become more and more fragmented, a holistic study of humanity and civilizations would be valuable. Artists as thinkers in and commentators on societies are free to delve into the notion of holistic and its connections to science, ethics, politics, and other elements of society including the issue of medium.

Artistic knowledge production might look counter-productive in the context of economic or

scientific knowledge production. Due to its reflective nature not producing action into a given structure, artistic knowledge production is not an act of constructing, but the act of acknowledging the very moment of artistic practice. Therefore, I view artistic knowledge production as a non-constructive production of knowledge. Such a type of knowledge production, however, presumes an intellectual and political stance often originating in the awareness of injustice in society and including the right to be a “ghost” in society as a fundamental human condition.

The condition for the existence of human beings does not erase the trivial need for speaking and non-speaking about notions of vulnerability such as shame, poverty, insanity, ignorance, and incapability manifested as urgency and subject matter. Today’s globalization seems to no longer allow that vulnerability of both speaking and non-speaking, since even the sciences need to disguise the existential struggle as a human condition in the face of managerial thought. Unmasking that disguise could enable us to face each other’s naked “facelessness” as vulnerable beings, which seems to be the very subject for human beings to share with each other.

My understanding of a holistic anthropology as subversive makes me believe that anthropology could help to rethink the shadow side of humanity without erasing the right to vulnerability. Artistic practices which always refuse singular, rigid concepts - which might be called the very concept of art - but rather prefer continuous movement, could be considered a struggle against the reductionistic tendencies against humanity. Instead of hiding behind the never-ending debate about the death of ideology and idealism, I want to cling to unexplainable contradictions as a necessary element of the human condition.

Hiroshi Yoshioka

Hiroshi Yoshioka is Professor of aesthetics and art theory at the Faculty and Graduate School of Letters, Kyoto University and also teaches at IAMAS, Konan University, Doshisha University and Kobe University. Yoshioka is the author of several books in Japanese addressing issues of thought, the brain, cyberspace and information.

“The world began without the human race and will certainly end without it.” This is one of the most frequently quoted sentences from Claude Lévi-Strauss’ *Tristes Tropiques* (1955) and I believe this represents an essential insight underlying anthropological thinking. While thinking about what humans are, it is always important to imagine the vast, non-human expanse outside the realm of humanity. So, in order to open a new area of knowledge about ourselves, to conceive an “anthropology” of any kind, I think it is essential to keep this background view in mind; the view that the human race occupies an extremely limited part of the universe both in space and in time. Through the development of modern technology and globalization, we have been persuaded for too long to believe that humans should seek infinite freedom and realize their unbounded possibilities. What we are will be defined by what we will achieve by pushing the frontier, by making an adventure into the unknown. Anthropology teaches us that such a view is sheer folly. The only way to know what we are is by realizing the fundamental limitations of humanity and to know the modest but distinct presence of the past rather than hyperbolized, futuristic visions.

I think the importance of this self-recognition should also be acknowledged in “artistic anthropology”. Artistic anthropology as signifying a change should be an alternative to traditional art history and replace art history as the norm by something to encompass multiple artistic activities in the world. Through the expansion of conceptual art and the emergence of post-conceptual practices after the 1990s, many historical descriptions of contemporary art are dominated, I believe, by an idea of dialectics of art driven by its inner logic.

Nicolas Bourriaud’s “relational aesthetics” has no doubt prepared a new concept to make sense of various artistic practices for the last two decades, but it still seems to be restrained by the idea of art history as a norm, as a pivotal discourse to distribute meanings to art works, with its idea of “relations” remaining abstract and undefined.

In my view, whatever new paradigm we need to understand art in the 21st century should be formed through the process of radical decentralization. Just as knowledge in cultural anthropology becomes possible at all only when one frees oneself from often unspoken preconceptions about superiority of modernity and progress, “artistic anthropology” will be able to produce knowledge only when we get rid of vestiges of modernism and progression which still seem to exist in many post-modern, post-colonialist discourses.

Today, whether you are an artist, audience, art historian or art critic, you are placed in a situation of constant shift between the subject and the object. Like an anthropologist observing people in a certain local culture, in the contemporary situation of art you are always looking at and being looked at simultaneously. Although we still need modern institutions such as museums, academies and the art market, they are in the process of dissolution and reorganization. One of the most important things we learn from Nam June Paik is that a playful shift between the subject and the object (or the West and the East in some contexts) could be a powerful engine of artistic creation.

From the perspective of medium-specificity, I think we have to keep in mind that the real significance of a particular medium can only be understood in the particular chronological and geopolitical context art takes place. Our world is an assemblage not only of different areas, but also of different times where interpretations of time differ. The diagnosis of today’s “post-medium condition” by Rosalind Krauss can effectively be applied to the territory where people have been directly and strongly influenced by Western modernism, but will be of no help in the rest of the world. And we should know that “the rest of the world” is expanding in both a geographical and institutional sense. In Japan, for example, we observe a dramatic expansion of art formerly called subculture or pop-culture, including manga, anime, culture of

games, digital gadgets, and so on. But none of us has as yet a proper theoretical platform for analyzing and discussing the issue, besides the propaganda notion of “cool Japan.” What I hope artistic anthropology can bring about is to secure such a platform. One great advantage of anthropological thinking is that it encourages us to pay attention to things and activities normally ignored as insignificant.

Finally, as to the problem of classification, I am not so much concerned with a spectacle showing a struggle between an old and a new form of knowledge as with the process of slow but steady erosion of old practices through new types of practices.

Let me conclude with a recent exhibition in Japan, which I think can be considered an example of artistic anthropology. It is **[Big Rest] Gardening for the Future 1,095m²**, a solo exhibition of Tadasu Takamine in Sendai Mediatheque during November 11 through December 24, 2008. I was officially involved in this project as the “supervisor”, but what I actually did was a series of discussions with the artist. Takamine organized a group of local people in the city of Sendai to collaborate with him and created a big “garden” in the middle of the exhibition space’s floor using various materials taken from an old local house that was scheduled to be torn down soon. He also presented some images from the Hanshin Awaji earthquake which took place in 1995. And he organized a group of visually impaired people to give a tour(!) for visitors. The work may sound like a medley of many heterogeneous elements - discussions with me as a “supervisor”, a workshop-style production process with local people, recycling stuff from a house being demolished, images of human powerlessness in the face of a natural disaster, and the controversial idea of deploying blind guides - but I experienced that the whole process of the **[Big Rest] Gardening for the Future 1,095m²** project yielded important knowledge about relations and connectivity based on a specific space/time. I hope that the notion of artistic anthropology will be able to produce a framework for discussing art practices like this project - and many similar emerging ones.

David Zerbib

David Zerbib is a researcher based in Paris where he teaches Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art at the University of Paris 1 Pantheon-Sorbonne and at the École supérieure d’art d’Annecy. His research interests focus mainly on the notion of performance. Recently Zerbib published “Nam June Paik. Madness in the age of random access,” in *Artpress* 2, n°12, January 2009.

What concept of artistic anthropology calls for reflection in this context? Claude Lévi-Strauss defined anthropology as a “comprehensive knowledge of mankind, encompassing subjects in all historic and geographic scopes; aspiring for a knowledge that can be applied to all human development.”¹ Such science of course appropriates the object “art” to develop, through anthropology of art, learning especially on the fundamental forms of representations relating to given cultures and techniques. But “art” of anthropology does not consist merely of its conceivable object. In fact, like all science, anthropology cannot be limited to a mere combination of rigorous epistemology and purely rationally defined methodology. Paul Feyerabend points it out through the “anarchist” dimensions of the “hardest” sciences: all science is partly “artistic” and during its evolution makes use of aesthetic processes and integrates sensible facts not directly related to a rational optimization of cognitive resources.² Thus, from object art turns into the quality of science. Human sciences a fortiori is no exception. We know in this respect how much photography accompanied and conditioned the works of Claude Lévi-Strauss, how much his anthropology articulates sensibility and knowledge.

The opposite has also been the case. Art displaying cognitive potential, using rational methods, implementing experimental protocols, and continuously producing knowledge brought into play by experience, often maintaining close relations with science. All the more when it concerns a science such as anthropology, a study of mankind likely to be nourished by art, the latter activity has been dealt with especially in romanticism, as the highest achievement of the essence of mankind. But

— 1
Claude Lévi-Strauss, 1958,
Anthropologie structurale,
Paris: Plon. (author’s translation).

— 2
Cf. Paul Feyerabend, 2003,
La science en tant qu’art,
Paris: Albin Michel.

we can also reflect on how the Renaissance linked the construction of mankind to the creation of artistic forms. As mentioned in Alberti’s work published in 1485, “On the art of building” is inseparable from building mankind itself. ³ Likewise, the project of building a new humanity within artistic modernity is also the concern of an artistic anthropology. Here, knowledge about mankind deals less with the understandability of “all human development” of the past than with the establishment of future conditions to be developed as part of the progress that this renewal makes possible.

Thus, art has an anthropological nature. If we stick to this idea, it seems difficult to attribute to an artist in particular the specificity of an “anthropology from an artistic point of view” - to paraphrase Kant and his anthropology from a pragmatic point of view - since art would appear like a permanent place of anthropology in a sense of questioning the act of what humans do and how they build or construct themselves in and by art. Different parameters need to be defined from this global point of view, and it is from the variations of these parameters that the specificity of an artistic positioning can be understood. It is also in this framework that we can imagine the impossibility of a “global knowledge” about humankind. But such an impossibility still brings out a sense of anthropology, namely impossible anthropology, impossibility remaining despite all, a limit, anthropological question.

Four parameters: representational, conceptual, performantial, technical.

We can distinguish four parameters in which we can identify pragmatic parameters of artworks in general, focused here on the axis of anthropological questions. That means that we postulate the relevance - for art as well as for anthropology - of an inscription of art, including modern and contemporary art, in a certain logic of human development, which would establish a transhistoric link between, for instance, Paleolithic rock painting and abstract expressionism, or the gestures of a Korean shaman and a performance in a shopping mall at the heart of an European city. ⁴

— 3
“Some claimed that water and fire were at the source of the development of human societies. As for me, considering the utility and necessity of the roof and the wall, I would persuade myself that they played a much more important role to make men closer to one another and keep them united”. Léon Battista Alberti, 2004, *L’art d’édifier*, transl. Pierre Cay and Francoise Choa, p. 48, (author’s translation).

— 4
The example of the Korean shaman is suggested here, with regard to the relationship between theater and anthropology. Richard Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

The first of the parameters would involve the image of human beings projected in or by artistic activity. It is about the human figure to be perceived in art, with its significant formal characteristics and its iconological and symbolic functioning. We could refer to this as the representational parameter.

The second parameter is about ideas and conceptions of human beings and their more or less explicit and formalized development used, conveyed or produced by artistic activity. These anthropological concepts coexist particularly with other philosophical and political ones. This could be called the conceptual parameter.

The third parameter implies the activity - whatever it may be and whatever the medium - that presumes execution and manifestation, ritual and spectacle while bringing into play sensible and symbolic contexts, the position of artists and those addressed, raising questions about the culture and community artists are integrated in. This could be said to be the performantial parameter. ⁵

The fourth parameter is called the technical parameter. The first three dimensions would not be efficient nor effective without implementing techniques, mediums or instruments whose nature defines forms of reason, relations with time and space; without introducing materials in which the human figure is cast, an idea of mankind and human is constructed, erased, transformed, transcended, pluralized, and reconstructed.

Deconstruction of technology, reconstruction of anthropology

Among the numerous examples that need to be elaborated to study the functioning of these parameters in artistic anthropology, Nam June Paik’s work could serve as a starting point. I would like to briefly point out a few elements at the heart of the connections of Paik’s anthropological and artistic “syntheses”, creating a machine, just like the *Paik-Abe Synthesizer* produces new figures and gestures of humanization. ⁶

— 5
Performantial rather than performative: in order to emphasize practical and sensible sides of performance in play and not exclusively bringing these dimensions to the effects of performativity of symbolic and linguistic nature.

— 6
Some of these leads were developed in our contribution to the catalog *The Gift of Nam June Paik 2: “Paik and the humanization of technology: the other logos of tekhnè”*.

Paik's artistic anthropology relates to the project of "humanizing technology". There we can observe one of the essential conceptual parameters of this procedure: the idea of human technology. Body-machine, sex-musical instrument connections, image-voice interactions, hybridization, incorporation, allegorization, technological anthropomorphism (robots)... These are the operations realized based on the central concept of human technology. However, that concept would only be a chimerical illustration if, at a deep level, the technology did not become the place of overcoming the clash between *physis* and *tekhnè*, between nature and technical, between physical movement and techno-artistic dynamic. The connection TV/ Garden (*TV Garden*, 1974) literally exemplifies that clash. The flow of electrons, especially inside a cathode-ray tube, becomes a means of overcoming such clashes. Another work, *Moon is the oldest TV*, (1965) manipulates the video signal producing on the screen some spherical luminous forms with varying dimensions, allowing a materializing evolution of a lunar cycle without image capture.

The technical or technological parameter is fundamental in Paik's work. Obviously, when we talk about medium, it is about the means as well as the environment of the work. As such, the concept of human technology is actually connected to the concept of technological humanity. This concept presumes that there is no man without technique. If Aristotle claims that man is an animal gifted with logos, the rational speech, Paik's works shows man as a technological animal, i.e. an animal whose tools and instruments are languages; in that sense technique is consubstantial with reason. Also man is an animal whose very natural surrounding is a medium, i.e. a means of symbolization and a symbolical environment.

The image of mankind shown by Paik in his sculptures, installations, videos or performances is that of a humanity divided between, on the one hand, contemplation of a new infinite cyclic but immanent time, mediatized and technologically secularized (lunar cyclical time or television stanza of Buddha); and on the other hand, permanent rupture of flow of images of culture (*Global Groove*). As a consequence, face and figures of subjectivity are unstable, since they depend on the choice of handling, of connections and of magnetic fields



Nam June Paik
Hand and Face, 1961 (still images).
Nam June Paik Art Center Collection

in the work at that given moment. The representational parameter is anthropologically contradicting. The human figure does not have a mimetic value, or a realistic imitation. The figures are the result of technological manipulations, which inscribe in the mimetic process a random and free access, i.e. the principle of *random access*. In this sense, the representational parameter always refers to activity, gestures, dynamics and forces of images. In other words, to the performantial parameter of an artistic anthropology. Of course, there are performances by Paik, filled with references to, for example, Korean traditional clothes. But the anthropological value of Paik's performances exceeds these explicit significations of religious rituals. The handling of magnets, the gestural mask of *Hand and Face*, the distortions, intentional dysfunctions, short circuits and effect of saturation, reversals, coverings and the hybridizations are all so many movements and gestures easily assimilated within a process of alteration.

Alteration, a principle Georges Bataille in particular identified as the source of all representation, obtains an immanent meaning in Paik's work.⁷ In Paik, alteration, the fundamental performantial parameter, inscribes the art practice at the heart of an anthropological project. Against the background of a technological development a 20th-century philosophy identified as a threat for the development and progress of humankind, Paik deconstructs technology - which would imply the reevaluation of the logo-centrism of our conception of technology - in order to impose the artistic conditions of an anthropological reconstruction.

— 7
George's Bataille's theory of alteration is developed in his review of G.H. Luquet *L'art primitif* in *Documents*, II, no. 7 (1930), collected in *Oeuvres complètes*, Volume I, (1970), Paris: Gallimard, pp. 389-397. Cf. David Zerbib, "Paik and the humanization of technology: the other logos of tekhnè" in *Gesture and Speech* (1993), Cambridge, Mass. & London: MIT Press.

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Editors /
Youngchul Lee, Director NJP Art Center
Henk Slager, Dean MaHKU, Utrecht, The Netherlands

Final Editing /
Annette W. Balkema

Translations /
Ji-Young Yoo, Soojung Park, Wonhwa Yoon.

Design /
TEXT (Jin Jung, Han Jeong Hoon)

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Claudia Pestana

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85 Sanggal-dong, Giheung-gu Yongin-si,
Gyeonggi-do, Korea
Tel 031 201 8500 Fax 031 201 8530
Email info@njpartcenter.kr
Web www.njpartcenter.kr

