

NAM JUNE PAIK

Video Time – Video Space

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Front cover:

Robespierre, 1989

9 televisions, 1 laser disc player, a saw

118x68x19"

Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. In the background,
the fresco *La Fée Electricité*, 1937, by Raoul Dufy

Collection Galerie Beaubourg, Paris

Back cover:

Candle TV, 1975

Television casing with burning candle

Staatsgalerie Stuttgart

Frontispiece:

Nam June Paik with *Shigeko's Buddhas*, 1986,
at the Museum Ludwig, Cologne

(Photo, Rainer Rosenow)

N A M J U N E P A I K

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Wolfgang Drechsler
Museum des 20. Jahrhunderts Vienna

나도 이제 원에서 다섯이 넘었으니 次次 죽는 練習을 해야겠다. 예전 어른이면은 地官을 데리고, 理想的인 墓處를 찾아 다닐 그럴 나이가 됐으나, 나는 돈도 없고 요새는 땅값도 비싸졌으니 그런 國土浪費計劃은 없애고 오붓하게 죽는 재미를 만드는 것이 上策이다.

나의 人生의 幸運의 하나는 Cage가 完全成功하기 前에, Beuys가 거의 無名때에, 만나 놓은 것이다. 따라서 今世紀의 巨匠인 두 年長者와 逆境時代의 同志로써 同等히 交友를 維持할 수가 있었던 것이다.

Now that I'm almost sixty, it's time for me to practice a bit of dying. People of my age in olden times in Korea were out in the mountains accompanied by a geomancer in search of a propitious site for a grave. However, I've no money for that and land prices became so steep. let's live on and die by an ersatz.

The one good fortune in my life was that I got to know John Cage while he was considered more a gadfly than a guru and Joseph Beuys when he was still an eccentric hermit in Düsseldorf. Therefore it was possible for me to associate myself on equal footing with these two senior masters as colleagues even after their stardom.

Published in the catalogue
Nam June Paik: Beuys Vox 1961-1986
Won Gallery/Hyundai Gallery, Seoul, 1990

V I D E O T I M E – V I D E O S P A C E

Notes on an Exhibition:
Zurich and Basel, Düsseldorf and Vienna

“Compared to satellite, exhibition is just peanuts!”
Nam June Paik in conversation, August 1990

Video Time and *Video Space* were the titles of recent parallel exhibitions of work by Nam June Paik in Basel and Zurich, subsequently combined for presentations in Düsseldorf and Vienna. The titles identified the main concepts of the two shows, which featured both the life and work of the Korean-American artist.

Paik, the “father of video art” (to start with one of numerous titles lavished on him), is now seen as a star on the international stage in his own right, like his artist friends John Cage and Joseph Beuys, whom he so revered. Nevertheless, Paik had remained largely unknown in Switzerland. Thus, his spectacular appearance in two Swiss cities simultaneously was prompted not because he was already entrenched in the local art scene, nor because regional museums were ready to present him as a leading light of the Fluxus movement or the guru of video art. Rather, the exhibitions grew out of the artist’s personal connection with a coterie of museum curators, collectors, gallery owners, and fellow artists who had a very high regard for his impressive output, now spanning more than thirty years. Many of these friends and acquaintances have long followed Paik’s work, and he continually renews his contacts with them, even if only in connection with commentary for a catalogue.

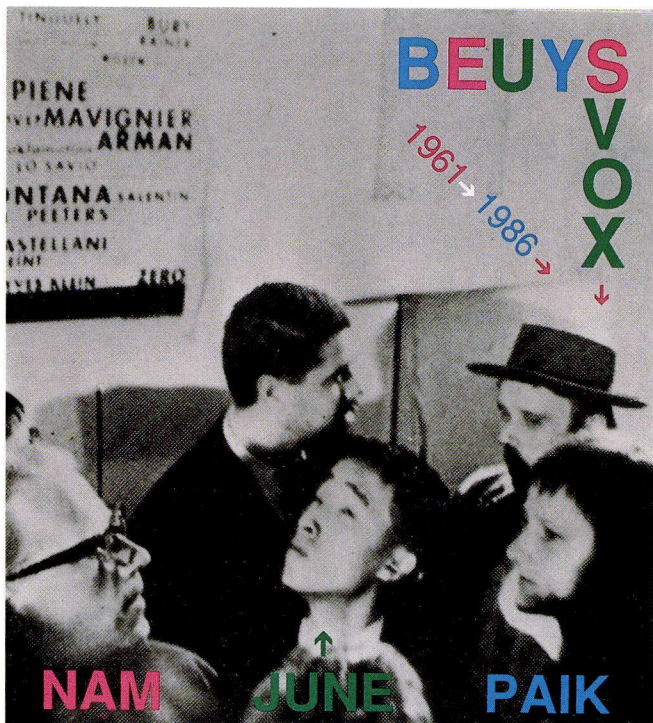
In 1981, while installing the exhibition *Video Sculptures* by Japanese artist (and Paik’s wife) Shigeo Kubota in the DAAD-Galerie in Berlin, I had interested Paik in a large-scale survey of his work “sometime or other,” if the opportunity presented itself. At that time, other similar interest arose, when the director of Kunsthalle Basel, working at the time in the *Archiv Sohm* in the Stuttgart Staatsgalerie, continually came upon Paik’s influential work and was considering devoting a show to him later, in his new Basel venue. Paik had been looking toward Zurich for a long time, and with a stroke of sophisticated diplomacy, suggested that the Basel opportunity was just the link he needed to have shows arranged simultaneously on the Limmat and the Rhine.

In trying to avoid merely duplicating exhibitions, and while looking for a plausible concept for their division, a consensus soon emerged to make the large, multi-TV installations from the mid-seventies onward the core of the Zurich show, while Basel would focus on biographical “stations” or milestones of the artist’s life, starting with his birth in Seoul in 1932 and featuring earlier as well as recent work.

Paik was known in Vienna because his early action and Fluxus projects along with works by other artists from the former Hahn Collection in Cologne had been acquired about twelve years earlier for the Museum Moderner Kunst in the city. As for Düsseldorf, he had deep roots there, having worked almost exclusively in the Rhineland from 1958 to 1963—in Cologne, Wuppertal, and Düsseldorf itself. It was there at the Galerie Schmela that he met Joseph Beuys, the “eccentric hermit,” as Paik dubbed him, in a first fleeting encounter that marked the beginning of a friendship and working partnership that was to last until Beuys’s death in 1986. Düsseldorf was also where the world premiere of Paik’s *One for Violin Solo* took place in 1962, a highly acclaimed event which overnight changed the approach to the playing of classical instruments for the Rhineland avant-garde. Then in 1979, a year after the epoch-making concert that he organized with Beuys in memory of the late Fluxus master George Maciunas, Paik became a professor of electronic media in Düsseldorf. Video art is central to his courses at the Kunstakademie, where he has won a large following of dedicated students.

It seems especially appropriate that all four exhibitions were in cities with major rivers—two connected by the same river—“flow” being an apt association for a former Fluxus artist.

While video art is still considered “difficult” in some quarters, Paik always tries to make it accessible, combining high entertainment with meaningful symbolic content. Even though this “media art” is now in its fourth decade, some viewers, on the one hand, do not accept it as genuine art because it incorporates electronic components; on the other hand, some observers find it tedious,



Cover for the catalogue
Nam June Paik: Beuys Vox 1961–1986
 Won Gallery/Hyundai Gallery, Seoul, 1990
 Photo shot at the Zero Exhibition, Galerie
 Schmela, Düsseldorf, 1961

because often extreme slow-motion sequences do not permit the immediate overall impression that comes with looking at traditional painting, sculpture, or even “environment” works. What usually goes together with these criticisms is the equation of video art with watching a videotape, which only differs from ordinary television programming in the distinctive aesthetics brought to the latter. Precisely because Paik comes from the field of music he understands these objections and obstacles and has been overcoming them effectively for years.

“Stations”

Whether with simply manipulated black-and-white televisions or complex multimonitor color installations, Paik’s objective has always been to make the TV set itself, that is, the monitor, the box with the screen, comprehensible in its own right as part of a sculpture, not as a mere conveyance for the picture it screens. The software he uses is selected less for its narrative content than for its colorfulness, the various tempi of its editing sequences, and its kaleidoscopic patterns. Paik puts these together with fragments from his own much-used tapes as well as commercials and MTV-type footage.

Video Time—that is, making video visible as a moving image in time, as visual “music”—and *Video Space*—that

is, the physical placement of this phenomenon—were thus impressively combined in multipartite sculptures and installations that can be experienced visually in many different ways.

In this first European retrospective of his video installations since 1976 (the year of Paik’s exhibition at the Kunstverein, Cologne), a main attraction was certainly the thirteen-part video sculpture *My Faust* (1989–1991), in which the artist used thirteen “stations” (corresponding to thirteen New York cable-TV channels) to represent as many subjects of universal interest (education, medicine, agriculture, etc.), in a kind of Faustian flight over our globe. Each “station” grouped the screens in a richly ornamented neo-Gothic construction inspired by the thirteen (from a former fourteen) Stations of the Cross. For Paik, the churchlike construction is a metaphor for institutions as such. Each station, or channel, as Paik also calls them, is equipped with twenty-five monitors fed by three laser discs. The last of these is devoted to UHF. Paik combines elements of modern electronic mass media by featuring a television, a laser disc, and a satellite dish in this construction, to represent communication as one of the thirteen universal topics, and at the same time, to symbolize a part of his own biography. In a kind of whimsical self-parody, he combines the high-tech components with mundane autobiographical objects: an ordinary little electric heater (warmth for the artist against a cold world); a rumpled, casually hung-up jacket (to symbolize how little the “Zen Master of Video” is concerned with his personal appearance); plus catalogues, photos, and press clippings of his work.

The inclusion of his own persona (and by implication, the artist’s place in the world) among great universal themes may be the first statement of how Paik sees global subject matter as being determined by the creative individual. The “stations” of his biography are significant: his own family in Seoul, who led him to art; the fathers of his philosophical and practical education, Marx and Schoenberg; the mentors of his later artistic growth, Cage and Beuys. His background is invoked not because of narcissistic self-reflection but to point out how these essential providers of his life energy contributed to his quest for an enlightened “Global Village.” Paik’s early work in action art, his first exhibitions, his innovations with video installation, multimonitor environments, his writings and advisory work for the Rockefeller Foundation, his teaching, his recently created *Family of Robot* dedicated to friends and important historical figures, his shows in Germany, the United States, Japan, France, England, Switzerland—all of these were “stations” for the artist on his way to the truly global works that followed. Now there are the satellite programs, four in all, one significantly entitled *Wrap Around the World*.



Nam June Paik, 1986 (Photo, Rainer Rosenow)

With these projects, extremely elaborate and expensive even by commercial television standards, Paik has succeeded in an unprecedented way in attracting as many viewers to sophisticated cultural programming as are drawn to television screens for Super Bowl Sunday.

In addition to featuring the thirteen-station *My Faust*, the *Video-Time* exhibition encompassed other significant milestones in Paik's career since 1963—in effect, a retrospective of the work he produced in Seoul, Tokyo, Munich, Freiburg, Cologne, Wiesbaden, Düsseldorf, and New York.

Paik's TV/video sculpture evolved from his original work as a music historian and composer. After studying music in Korea, Japan, and Germany, he began to perform his own innovative action music in the late fifties, influenced and encouraged by composers John Cage and Karlheinz Stockhausen, and the artist Mary Bauermeister. Work with audio electronics then led him to visual electronics, then experimentation with manipulated television sets began and subsequently became part of his now legendary Wuppertal exhibition at the Galerie Parnass in 1963. *Exposition of Music—Electronic Television* was its title, and television sets (thirteen, even back then) sent out sounds in varied, innovative ways. At the time, the show went largely unnoticed by the general public and critics, and Paik's contribution to multimedia art was erratic during that period. But even in those early days, the focal points of his handling of time and space were established: manipulation of cathode-ray tubes and later, electronically produced and conveyed images inspired by music, with the television cabinet itself as the sculptural framework.

Fluxus performances, which were getting underway at about that time, created a considerable sensation, laying the groundwork for body art and performance art, and affecting many events of the mid-sixties avant-garde scene in New York, the city to which Paik had moved in 1964—above all because of his great admiration for John Cage. Counterculture attacks were mounted in all directions: the very instruments of art, such as the violin or piano, became targets—and “Big Brother,” the ubiquitous television set, was among them. But Paik was quick to realize that television, as the mass medium of the future, would be the metaphor—the very heart of this creative expression.

“Television has attacked us for a lifetime, now, we strike back”

Paik has established his own, inner images to counter the rising tide of media images that crowd in on us from the outside. His recent gigantic wall construction *Fin de Siècle II* (1990–91), kaleidoscopic, with high-speed,

almost subliminal images, is set against the tediously long, slow-motion, self-reflecting closed-circuit sequences shown in *TV Buddha* (1974). Here, a Buddha sculpture contemplates its own image on a television screen—probably the most beautiful example of a format that is technically quite simple, but makes a very pointed statement.

As early as 1962–63, Paik's basic ambivalence toward electronics could be seen in his work. It can still be seen, with differing emphasis, in his latest video installations and TV robots, which engage his interest more and more, and which keep pace with changing technology—color television, video synthesizers, and high-quality electronically produced images—images whose colors occur neither in nature nor in traditional art, as Henri Cartier-Bresson once discovered to his amazement.

The technical possibilities in manipulating TV images—the signals that appear on the screen—were small at first, limited to direct intervention in the cathode-ray tube or deflection of the electron beams using magnets. The compact television camera for recording and editing one's own pictures wasn't available until Sony introduced its Portapak in 1965, which Paik was among the first to acquire and use as a creative medium. The video synthesizer, which constructs and abstracts images in innumerable exciting ways, was developed by Paik with Japanese electronics engineer Shuya Abe, and became available in 1970. From that moment on, it was possible to change color and transform movement and sequence of even broadcast images in almost infinite variations.

With all of these technological advances, in his use of various tools Paik's strength remains his treatment of time and space as subjects. This connects him intrinsically with Cage, despite all of the differences in their objectives, which have sharpened through the years, an observation that Cage himself makes in a friendly though somewhat critical way (see Cage essay, *On Nam June Paik*).

“Not enough”—“Too much”—“The more the better”

Paik's most important contribution to contemporary art—if one excludes for the moment the satellite TV broadcasts—are the multi-TV installations that started to appear as early as the mid-sixties, but evolved into an independent art form from the mid-seventies on. These works, which continue anew to the present time, always incorporate the latest technical advances and state-of-the-art engineering, though they started with relatively simple components. Above all, the subject is consistent: the concept of time, with television as the medium to convey that message. *Moon Is the Oldest TV* (1976)

evokes the phases of the moon using manipulated cathode-ray tubes in twelve black-and-white televisions running simultaneously. *TV Clock* (1977 version with twelve black-and-white and twelve color TVs) has “hands” that suggest the division of the clock face into twelve daytime hours and twelve nighttime hours, the artist’s comment on the use of a static measurement for a fleeting phenomenon, time. Other well-known works in the series are *TV Garden* (1974–78), shown at *documenta 6*, which integrates a “second generation” garden—electronically produced film footage—with actual plants.

Discussed earlier, *Fin de Siècle II* and *My Faust* are probably the most comprehensive examples of Paik’s approach to the complex duality of the medium—its inherent appeal and its danger. While strongly drawn to it as a medium, he sees its “Big Brother” potential: the irony of television bringing us too little information on the one hand, and too much on the other. The daily flood of moving images that washes over the average television consumer (particularly in the United States, where five to six hours of daily televiewing is typical) is expressed by the ever-changing montage of images in the multiscreen installations. In tandem are the still-shots or the closed-circuit footage that barely moves and scarcely changes and periodically repeats itself (*Swiss Clock TV*, 1988). He amplifies television glut, the “too much” of it, by ceaselessly playing with the varying jigsaw puzzle of images, sometimes subject to the randomness of computer control. The kaleidoscopic effect is further enhanced when Paik places individual monitors away from or with their backs to one another, turns them on their heads altogether, or makes one screen reflect onto another—outdoing even the most innovative high-tech TV commercials, MTV, or laser light-show rock concerts. This larger-than-life amplification inevitably leads to “The more the better”—*Tadaikson* in Korean, the title Paik gave to an ambitious multiscreen installation set up in the Seoul National Museum during the 1988 Olympics, where 1,003 monitors of varying size were piled up to make a staggering, enormous column—at the same time a technological monument and a “sacred idol.”

Static—Ec-static

Along with the closed-circuit installations with their tautological approach to examining philosophical questions about reality and simulation, and the large-scale multiscreen exhibitions, Paik turned to a new expression in 1986 with his *Family of Robot*, which continues to gain new members.

With engineer Shuya Abe, in 1964–65 he built his first robot, which could move, speak, and also excrete beans while walking. The first exhibited *Robot*, christened *K-*

456 (an ironic and free variation on the well-known Köchel Catalogue of Mozart’s work), seems like a technological fossil in comparison with its contemporary descendants. In conjunction with its appearance in Paik’s exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1982, *K-456* fell victim to a car accident staged by the artist, who later characterized the episode as the “first traffic accident of the twenty-first century.”

In creating *Family of Robot*, which Paik sired twenty years after his original robot conception, the artist produced what is probably his most extensive artistic theme. The medium’s ambiguity is obvious in the personification of the “friendly” machine people, representing the entertainment value of television, that familiar quality which Paik calls the sweetness of TV—next to the cold, impersonal quality of television technology. Paik, who has been described as a “technological antitechnologist,” dedicates his robot relatives both to his own family—in a series with *Father and Mother*, *Grandfather and Grandmother*, *Uncle and Aunt*, etc.—and to the “family of revolutionary heroes” (1989) created to mark the bicentenary of the French Revolution; to *Don Quixote* fighting against primitive technology (1989—a self-portrait?); and also to his “second family,” which includes *Beuys* (1988), *Mercez/Digital* (1988), *Cage* (1990), and, as a tribute to his Swiss years, *Einstein* (1991).

The human form that these robots take, which consciously refers to traditional sculpture in their motionlessness, is constructed largely from old television and radio sets, as almost nostalgic industrial design readymades into which the latest laser-disc players are inserted. Used in this way as building blocks, the TV sets are further evidence of Paik’s previously postulated ambivalence toward the medium. The “ancient” televisions, with their partly neo-Gothic, partly late Baroque ornamentation, are at the same time leftovers from the first mass production of the world’s most important audio-visual communication device as it looked when it began taking over the living rooms of America in the forties. The friendly robot threatens to become a Frankenstein monster; Paik knows it and tells us he does in naming one of his creatures after a master of the macabre, *Edgar Allan Poe*.

More than any other work by Paik, the robots set the exaggerated flow of movement against motionlessness; statuary external form against the hyperdynamics of inner life; statics against ec-statics that Paik mentions in his conversation with Japanese architect Isozaki. The eternal and persistent aspect of classical sculpture, the statuary quality, is confronted by the most ephemeral of all artistic products, the pure, content-removed musicality of electronically produced images.

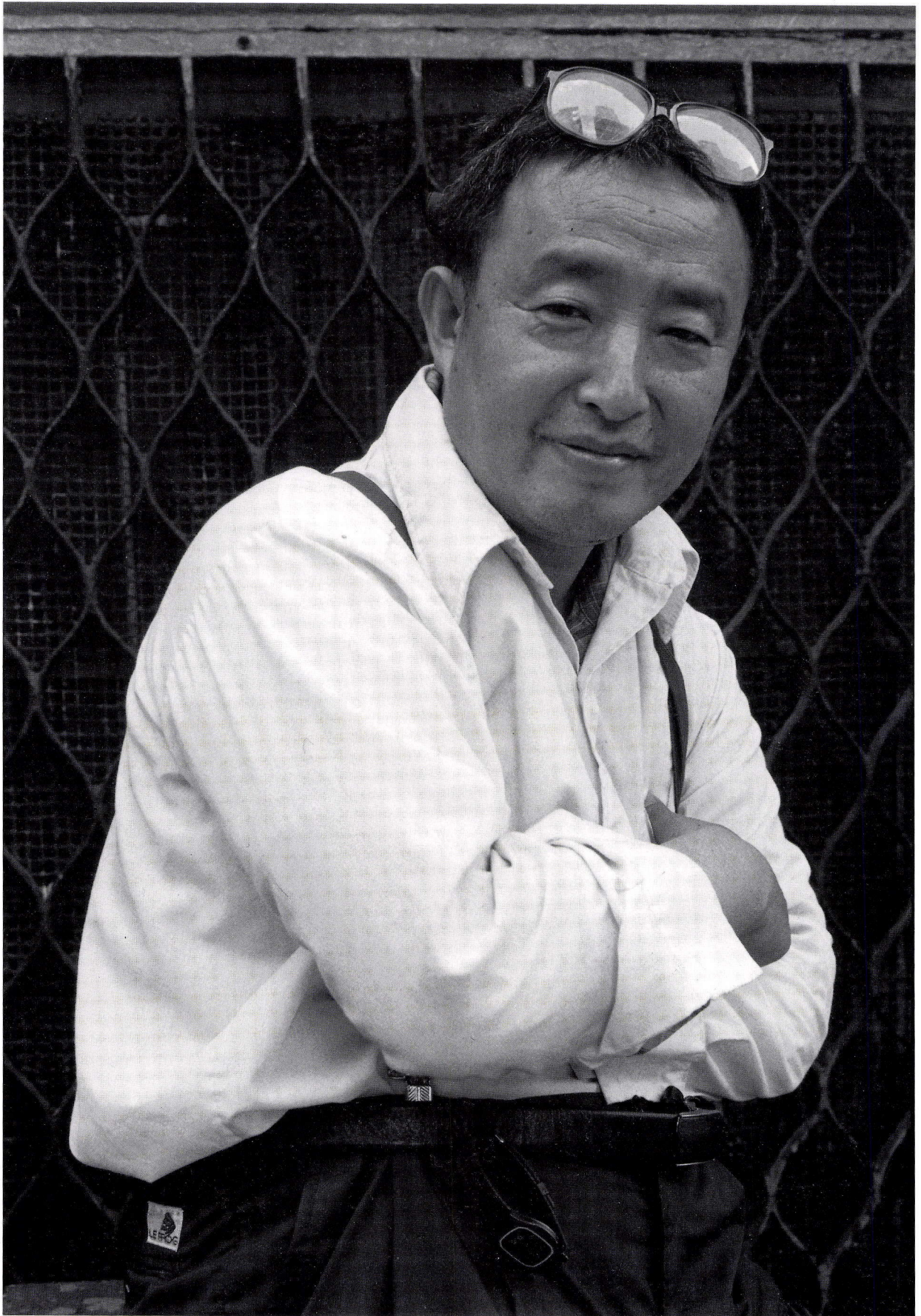
When Paik creations come together as a family in a museum presentation, the exhibition medium itself turns



out to be a participant in the illustration of time and space—with video and through video—for the robots in particular as *Video Time* and *Video Space*.

Toni Stooss, Curator at the Kunsthau Zurich from 1982 to 1992, joined the newly founded Kunsthalle Vienna as Director in 1992.

Don Quixote, 1989
Video sculpture, 94x59x47"
Galerie du Génie, Paris



Nam June Paik, 1985 (Photo, Chris Felver)

" P E N S É E S " A T 5 9

I told Manfred Eichel of NDR¹ that the five principles of the media are:

- 1 Sex
- 2 Violence
- 3 Greed
- 4 Vanity
- 5 Deception

He said, "I cannot agree with you more. You must write about it!"

Manfred Eichel has aired three hundred and fifty cultural TV shows. He knows the practical difficulty of transmitting reasonably important television without unreasonable boredom. He is not like those armchair strategists who just talk about media behind their academic screen.

Before Age Eighteen

You don't need a Freudian to tell you that most of our spiritual landscape is well defined before we reach age eighteen. I lived in Korea until I was seventeen and a half years old. Two big influences I picked up there were Karl Marx and Arnold Schoenberg.

Karl Marx—I don't need to explain—Marxism was a worldwide vogue, and there was good reason for it: We had just come out of two world wars caused by capitalistic greed. Marx provided us with the scientific reasoning and blueprint for a Utopia.

As for Schoenberg, I am still quite proud that I was able to discover him in the information-starved Korea of 1947 when I was only fourteen and a half years old. I was studying composition with Kon-Woo Lee and piano with Jae-Dok Shin, who were both in the inner circle of the great Soon-Nam Kim. Both Lee and Kim were excellent composers of atonalist music, and both voluntarily went to North Korea with the retreating North Korean Army in 1951. Certainly these naive young composers did not expect the hell of a Stalinist regime.

Later, in New York, I learned that Milton Babbitt of Princeton University, today's foremost Schoenbergian,

did not find Schoenberg until 1948, although he was born in the cultural milieu of New York's upper class and was many years my senior. I discovered Schoenberg in Korea and made him my guru one year before Milton Babbitt discovered him in New York.

This most likely had something to do with Seoul's bubbling atmosphere, in which people had the illusion of choice from a wide menu of Bakunin, Bukharin, Proudhon, Marx, French Syndicalism, Fabian Socialism, etc. From today's point of view, it reflects the immaturity of the Korean intellectuals, because we were actually just a chip on the table played by Stalin and John Foster Dulles.

Also, I knew of Bartók, Stravinsky, Hindemith, and Sibelius—all were famous mid-century contemporary composers. I opted for Schoenberg because he was the most radical one. I guess this qualification alone let me choose him, even before I had a chance to listen to him. This reflects the social atmosphere of Seoul, which was like a tinderbox before an explosion.

In 1947, the only actual musical score of Schoenberg that I had was the small piano piece "Opus 31." I had to extrapolate the whole universe of my "guru" from a single work, just as Richard Leakey based his fantastic conclusions about evolution on a few "Lucy-like" bones.² It took two years to beg the owner of the Swan record shop in Seoul to let me hear his Schoenberg record *Verklaerte Nacht Opus 6* (most likely the only Schoenberg record in Korea). However, I was at least educated enough to judge this piece to be just a Wagnerian pretension.

Then, on a sleepy afternoon in 1951, in Kamakura, Japan, I turned on NHK radio. There was a sensual soprano weeping with very dry dissonant sounds. I thought it *must* be Schoenberg, it cannot be anybody else. It was *Pierrot Lunaire*. I can still see the small, brown plastic radio box I was listening to.



Nam June Paik in Milan, circa 1989
(Photos, Farbrizio Garghetti)

Teachers

Lenin said the imperialist does not leave unless kicked out. Now, post-Leninists are inviting the imperialists back in order to retro-capitalize the post-Communist society, in the same way as the post-Lumumbaists did with the Belgians in the Congo in 1970.

Imperialists have been good teachers in India, Ethiopia, Africa, and Asia. Shridar Bapat said, "India is an invention of the British Empire," which inspires me to suggest, "India invented the wheel but Fluxus invented India." George Maciunas chuckled at this joke.

Koreans have had many "teachers," including the American imperialists who force-fed democracy. However, the foremost teachers were the Mongo-Manchu horseback people who brought us the two most important communication mediums of the nomadic times:

- 1 grammar;
- 2 the horse.

The importance of grammar was clear in the imperial dominion; for example, Queen Isabella "made" Spanish grammar immediately after the expulsion of the Arabs and Jews from the Iberian Peninsula in 1492. Korean imperialists invaded Japan and gave them the Ural-Altai grammar and the name of its first capital, Nara, which means *nation* in today's Korean.

It is morally unfair to vilify only Japanese imperialism (as they do in today's Korea) and forget about Manchurian-Mongolian and Chinese imperialism. The Japanese were not in a position to "return the favor" to us until the sixteenth century, because the technological flow was always from Korea to Japan. However, when the Portuguese brought guns to Japan first, before Korea, things

changed. But the invasion of the Manchus (one of many) was just as devastating as the sixteenth-century invasion of Shogun Hideyoshi.

Then why does the Korean grudge go only toward the Japanese? Besides the fact that Korea lost a war to Japan again in this century, this bias against the Japanese may have come as a result of sibling rivalry. Koreans who worshipped the Chinese as Big Brother for two thousand years had considered the Japanese as their juniors, and stopped the Japanese from using the land road to China. The Japanese had to take the hazardous sea route to China, which hampered their trade and learning. Therefore, when Korea got hit by these "juniors" in the sixteenth century and again in the twentieth century, wounded pride turned into hatred, which is only partially justified. The Japanese did the same kind of stuff that the English, French, Dutch, and others have been doing for three hundred years in Asia and Africa, and are doing to one another for a thousand years in Europe, and Asians have been doing it to one another for thousands of years as well.

Then why don't Koreans hate the Chinese, who forced the "Finlandization" of Korea for the past thousand years, and before fought three or four hot wars? I don't know.

Certainly the Chinese gave us many of our most important nouns: *property*, *tao*, *benevolence*, *duty*, and others. They gave us fifty thousand nouns, but these fifty thousand nouns did not contain one noun meaning *freedom*. They gave us the concept of greed and arbitrariness, but not the concept of freedom and liberty.

Theodore White³ had a hard time explaining this concept to the Communist cadres in 1943 Yanan, who



were quick to condemn freedom and individualism as personal egotism, vices that work against society and the masses.

The year of Columbus's "Discovery of America" is coming. Dick Gregory used to say, "How can you discover a continent inhabited by a million people?" However, from the Korean-Mongolian point of view, I must emphasize the role of Marco Polo and Ghengis Khan. Marco Polo showed that China existed. Indeed, China and India—full of riches—were there, and he brought back the compass and gunpowder, without which Columbus would either have been eaten up by fishes or killed off by the numerically superior Indians.

Marco Polo was able to reach China and return home to tell the story, because during that time, law and order was kept throughout the long passage to China by Ghengis Khan in the age of his *Pax Mongoliana*. What is the result? Through the invisible hand of Ghengis Khan, Columbus came to America and killed off the Indians—who are of the same ethnic strain as Ghengis Khan.

A Canadian specialist in Indian affairs told me without hesitation: "You are an Eskimo." Manfred Eichel said: "What irony. Write about it."

Last Question

I have asked many friends why we intellectuals tried to support Karl Marx for so long? Nobody has given me a satisfactory answer. Why is it chic to embrace Karl Marx and not Keynes?⁴ I don't know.

But I am allowed to ask this question, because if I had been loyal to my ideology, I would have died in Korea in

1951, or I would now be a grade-school teacher in North Korea—at best. We did not have the luxury of being hypocritical café-revolutionaries.

(English revised by Alan Marlis)

NOTES

- 1 Manfred Eichel's programs *Kultur Aktuell* and *Kulturreport* are broadcast on German television from Hamburg.
- 2 Fossil remains reconstructed by anthropologist/author Leakey.
- 3 Known best for his books on U.S. presidential campaigns, White was one of the first American journalist/authors to report in depth on Chinese communism.
- 4 John Maynard Keynes (1883–1946), English economist and author of *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money* (1935).



ON THE WORK OF NAM JUNE PAIK

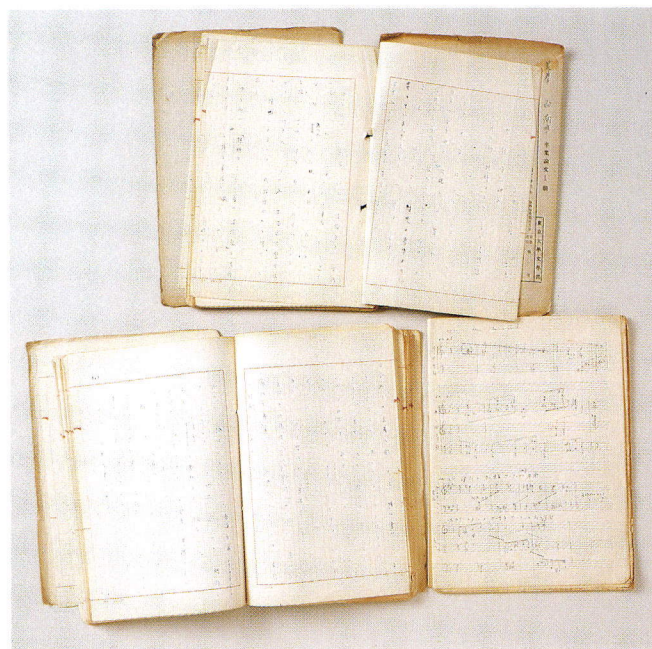
I have known Nam June Paik for more than twenty-five years. Though I wrote the text for the 1965 Bonino Gallery exhibition of his first TV works, I have never stated explicitly what I think of his musical work. Since Paik has frequently referred to our meeting as a turning point in his life and work, and since this panel is part of a major recognition of that life and work, it seems incumbent on me now to draw lines as clearly as I can between us, showing what I do in my work, what he does in his, and what area, if any, there is in which we are equally at home.

I find myself wanting to say that I have never thought of Nam June Paik as a composer. But that would not be true. Formerly, I was the only musician for the dance programs given by Merce Cunningham. Then there was also David Tudor, and somewhat later, Gordon Mumma, three of us. When Merce Cunningham began to multiply the number of his performances by programming *Events*, Tudor, Mumma, and I decided to open the Company programs to music provided by other composers. We could do this because the Cunningham dancers were trained to support themselves on their own two feet, not on the music. We believed that any other music than ours, providing it interested us, could go with the dance without disturbing it. Twice we have been proved wrong. Once with the music of Charlemagne Palestine, which consisted in large part of a recital of his thoughts while defecating, thoughts about how uncomfortable it was for him not only to move his bowels but to have his music (which he did not play) in a situation which was not a planned collaboration. And once with the music of Christian Wolff, which consisted of overtly political songs.

Our way of choosing composers was this. Each of us made a list of five. We then found names repeated from

one list to another. Finally we voted. In this way, Nam June Paik was invited to accompany two *Events* in the Westbeth Studio given by Merce Cunningham and Dance Company. Shigeko Kubota¹ sat beside Paik, who played just a few notes on the piano (it seems to me these notes were a quote from the literature), and then placed his head on the keyboard, giving the impression of someone filled with sorrow. This was an excerpt from his *Etude for Pianoforte*. Afterward, Shigeko told Merce: "Your dance beautiful! Nam June's music Ugh! Ugh! Ugh!" For the second evening Paik played a recording of the *Verklaerte Nacht* at a speed much slower than normal. Afterward, smiling, he said, "Now we know Schoenberg great composer."

It is frequently noted that Paik was trained as a musician at the University of Tokyo², having written his thesis on the work of Arnold Schoenberg; and that



Original manuscripts of Paik's thesis on
Arnold Schoenberg, Tokyo, 1956
1 score, 2 notebooks,
Sohm Archives, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart

Klavier Integral, 1958–63
Upright piano with alterations and additions,
53x55x17"
Museum Moderner Kunst Ludwig Foundation,
Vienna
Former Hahn Collection

among his early compositions, all of them conventionally notated, there are Korean folk-music-flavored pieces, serial melodies for solo violin, and a nonserial *String Quartet*. I know of no performances of these works. They seem to have been abandoned by the composer except for documentary or exhibition purposes.

I first met Nam June Paik in 1958 in Germany. I had been invited to teach and lecture at Darmstadt. I had more than twenty years earlier studied with Arnold Schoenberg for two years free of charge, having promised him in return to devote my life to music. I could argue that I have been faithful to my promise. Concerned to find a better reason for writing music than the one I had been taught—that was, to have something to say and say it—I had embarked on a study of Oriental philosophy, finally attending for two years the classes in the philosophy of Zen Buddhism given at Columbia University by Daisetz Suzuki. In one of his lectures, he drew an oval on the blackboard, placing two parallel lines halfway up the left-hand side. He said, This is the structure of the Mind. The two parallel lines are the ego. The ego has the capacity through its likes and dislikes to cut itself off from its experience whether that comes to it from above, the world of relativity, through the sense perceptions, or from below, the absolute, through the collective unconscious and the dreams. Or, instead of cutting itself off from it, the ego has the capacity to flow with its experience, and that is, Suzuki said, what Zen wants.

Having earlier taken as true the reason for writing music given me by Gita Sarabhai from her teacher in India—that is, to sober and quiet the mind, thus making it susceptible to divine influences—I then, in response to Suzuki's lecture, determined to go out rather than in, to use chance operations as a discipline in my music, a discipline equal I trusted to sitting crosslegged, having faith that the Mind's structure was indeed oval (continuous upon itself), that my writing of music would be as a result not self-expression but self-alteration. I had been practicing the discipline of chance operations for ten years before I met Paik. One or two years later, I found myself in Cologne attending a performance by him of his *Etude for Pianoforte*. Behind Paik as he performed was an open window, floor to ceiling. His actions were such we wouldn't have been surprised had he thrown himself five floors down to the street. When at the end he left the room through the packed audience, everybody, all of us, sat paralyzed with fear, utterly silent, for what seemed an eternity. No one budged. We were stunned. Finally, the telephone rang. "It was Paik," Mary Bauermeister said, "calling to say the performance is over."

I determined to think twice before attending another performance by Nam June Paik. In the course of my studies of Indian philosophy, I had become aware of the nine permanent emotions of aesthetic tradition. The

rasas. The four black: sorrow, fear, anger, disgust. The four white: the heroic, the wondrous, mirth, and the erotic. Finally, the one without color, in the center, toward which any work of art should conduce, tranquillity. The *Etude for Pianoforte* was definitely black, a mixing of sorrow, anger, and fear, and these three separate from tranquillity.

Some years later in New York, Paik invited Merce Cunningham and me to Canal Street to see his *Zen for Film*, an hour-long film without images. "The mind is like a mirror; it collects dust; the problem is to remove the dust." "Where is the mirror? Where is the dust?" In this case the dust is on the lens of the projector and on the blank developed film itself. "There is never nothing to see."

Here, we are both together and separate. My 4'33", the silent piece, is Nam June's *Zen for Film*. The difference is that his silence was not sounds but something to see. His life is devoted, it seems to me, not to sounds, but to objects. He is a performance artist and a sculptor. He activates, timeifies, sculpture with video. As an extraordinary performance artist, Paik is concerned with the emotional impact of his work on the audience. Left to himself, he accumulates and recycles a personal iconography not unlike a similar development in the work of Marcel Duchamp and Jasper Johns.

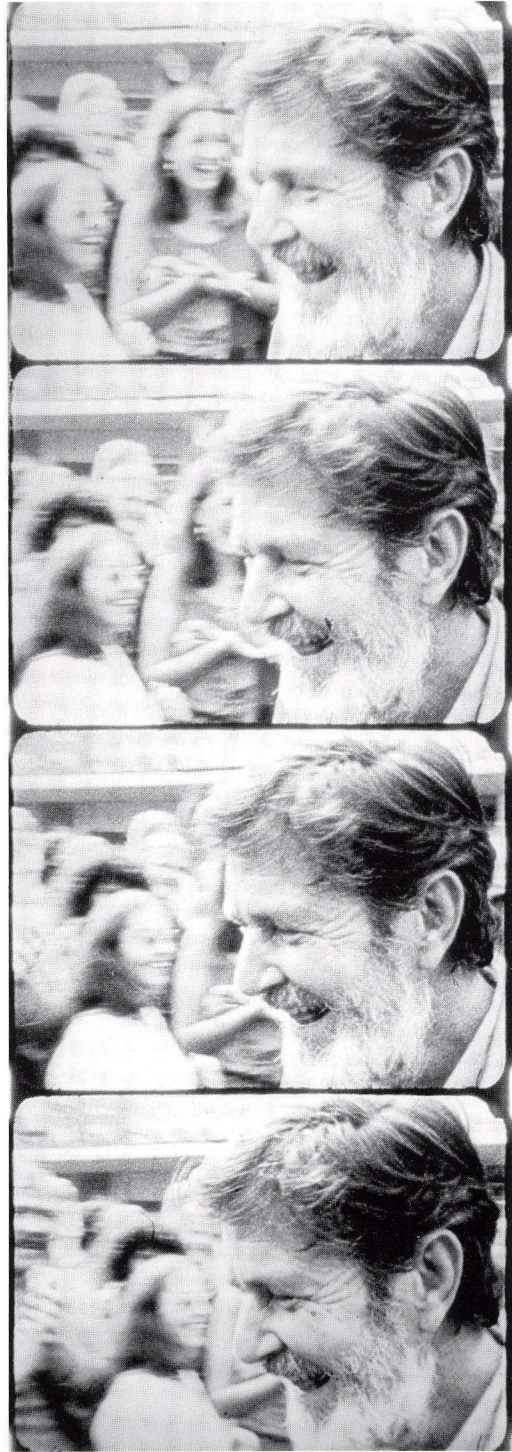
From a concentration on black rasas in *Etude for Pianoforte*, Paik moved through the colorlessness of tranquillity exemplified by *Zen for Film* to the concentration on the white rasas of the present exhibition. The result is a delightful and amazing spectacle. As Cathy Kerr said, "Cheerful." As Lise Freedman said, "Exuberant!" As Ray Gallon said, "Isn't it wonderful?" *Fish Flies on Sky*, those completing the work comfortably reclined below it. Or *TV Garden*. "I could hardly tear myself away." The moment I got off the elevator on the fourth floor I began smiling. I didn't stop until I left the building. A charming lady asked me whether I was John Cage. Admitted I was. "You must feel very close to this." I replied: "No closer than you; we are both on Madison Avenue." We were looking at *V-ramid*. Paik has shown us both sides of the coin, but as Suzuki said in response to the question, "Why do you say death one day and life the next?"—in Zen there's not much difference between the two.

In Zen they say: "Men are men and mountains are mountains before studying Zen." While studying Zen things become confused. After studying Zen men are men and mountains are mountains. Asked what the difference is before and after, Suzuki said, "No difference, just the feet are a little off the ground." Paik's involvement with sex, introducing it into music, does not conduce toward sounds being sounds. It only confuses matters. I am sure that his performance with Charlotte



John Cage during the shooting of
A Tribute to John Cage, 1973

Nam June Paik with John Cage
(Photo, Manfred Leve)



Four stills of *A Tribute to John Cage*, 1973

Moorman of my 26'1.1499" for a String Player is not faithful to the notation, that the liberties taken are in favor of actions rather than sound events in time. I am thinking of the point where Paik, stripped to the waist, imitates a cello, his back being bowed by Charlotte Moorman.

Once Virgil Thomson told me that his mother, after hearing my prepared piano for the first time, said, "It's very nice, but I would never have thought of doing it myself." A similar remark could be made about many of Paik's pieces, the *Serenade for Alison*, for instance, in which nylon panties, black lace panties, and blood-stained panties in the course of a striptease are stuffed into the mouths of a music critic, the second music critic, and the worst music critic, and the *Chronicle of a Beautiful Paintress*, which is a list of the months and the flags which are to be stained "with your monthly blood."³ But one would have to say instead of "very nice," "Shocking! and I would never have thought of doing it..." or "It's disgusting," etc.

The *Danger Music for Dick Higgins* ("Creep into the Vagina of a Living Whale") is pure fiction, not music, not danger, at all. That is to say, never to take place. The *Young Penis Symphony* is another matter. What with society's changed manners and the popularity of the present exhibition both with critics and art lovers, we can expect many performances, say two years ahead of Paik's schedule, "Expected World Première around A.D. 1984." Referring to one of the performances, however, a person will say, I saw it, not I heard it.

Likewise Paik's prepared piano *Klavier Integral* is in a museum, not in a concert hall. It is to be seen rather than heard.

His *Symphony No. 5*, dealing as it does with days, weeks, years, centuries, mega-years, is also not music but fiction.

In fact, the most musical of Paik's works are those for which he has given no performance directions, for which the accompaniment is simply the sounds of the environment. I am thinking of the ones which are just sculpture: *TV Chair*, *TV Buddha*, for instance.

John Cage, American composer, 1912–1992.

This previously unpublished text by Cage was his contribution to a panel discussion on May 21, 1982, sponsored by the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, during their Paik exhibition, April 30 through June 27, 1982.

NOTES

1 Japanese artist Shigeo Kubota is known for her video sculptures and installations. She is married to Nam June Paik.

2 Paik emphasizes the fact that he had previously studied music in Seoul.

3 "... in january, stain the american flag with your own monthly blood, in february, stain the burmese flag..."



I Am the World's Most Famous Bad Pianist, 1986
Television monitors, piano, cassette recorders,
52x65x31"
Carl Solway Gallery, Cincinnati



Paik in his New York studio, 1989
(Photo, Eric Kroll)

THE WORLD OF ART OF THE WORLD

Nam June Paik as Philosopher

Brainwashing and Satellite Art

Nam June Paik is an exemplary figure among inter-media artists and intellectuals—those few who are active within several disciplines and on an international basis. Friends and critics constantly stress the universalism of this Korean artist, who has spent many years in Japan, Germany, and the United States, and continues to travel widely. Paik has touched upon the disparity of cultures and people and their political systems in numerous essays and interviews, and in the last decade, has concentrated on satellite art.¹ Since the sixties, he has seemed to make the world of television and video particularly his own, and this direction acquired semiofficial status with his program for New Year's 1984, *Good Morning, Mr. Orwell*, broadcast simultaneously by American and French television stations to the United States, Canada, France, Germany, and Korea. Every schoolboy knows the story of "Big Brother," as told in George Orwell's novel *1984* (published in 1949): a world enslaved politically and by the media, a distorted version of Stalin's and Hitler's surveillance states starts to "brainwash" the last freethinkers under "Big Brother." Paik used this fable to suggest the inherent dangers of satellite television from its inception—alongside its great artistic and entertainment value.

After publication of Orwell's novel, research and reports on brainwashing spread widely through the countries of the West, going back to the purges during the thirties in the Soviet Union and the "thought reform" in China after the fall of Chiang Kai-shek's regime in 1949. At first they reinforced antipathy to the totalitarian regimes of the East, which had also been Orwell's intention. But experiments were also being carried out in the United States on the possibility of influencing human behavior through a controlled flow of stimuli. Donald Hebb, one of the best-known American university researchers concerned with questions on the stability of human self-perception, said at a conference in 1958 that the investigations he had conducted took brainwashing as their starting point: "We were not allowed to mention it

in our first publication."² The problem was that Western academics had to overcome suspicion that they were using the same methods as the Communist enemy. It was known from China that the preferred methods of breaking down politically suspicious prisoners were overstimulation and sleep deprivation. But from the Soviet Union in the early Stalinist period came reports of solitary confinement and stress inflicted through monotony. The Americans also had to address this question of reverse stimulation, the problem of sensory deprivation. When in space, their astronauts had to cope with the adverse psychological effects of being alone and generally unable to move in the cramped space capsule, possibly for weeks or even months on end, with no possible stimuli available except contact with ground control and their own instrument panels. The "stationary nomads" in the big-city apartment, Paik's epitome of the seventies television consumer,³ found a model twenty years earlier in the combination of poverty of movement and excessive stimulation. He sat by the screen at home, while his senses went on a journey. In space travel, the same thing was true in principle. The kind of volunteer needed for flying around Earth was not a heroic soldier or an adventurer but a willing guinea pig.⁴

Since the early fifties, the subjects *space flight* (a prospect full of hope, suggesting expansion and freedom) and *brainwashing* (the epitome of ethically reprehensible manipulation of personality) have belonged together like the two sides of a coin, because of the psychological conditions described, culminating in heteronomous confinement—a condition imposed from the outside. For Paik, but also for much of the American artistic community in the sixties, these two subjects became associated with a third idea, that the planet is shrinking to become a *Global Village*. From space, the whole planet Earth is visible, and our communication about our own life conditions runs from the very top and the far outside to the bottom and the inside. In the case of brainwashing applied to a single person, the same thing occurs conversely and *ex negativo*, with the totalitarian state also using world surveillance and a claim to a world domi-

nance. Space travel and brainwashing could be substitute terms for heaven and hell in the years after the so-called sputnik-shock. It is not until the *Global Village* comes along, explained by Marshall McLuhan in 1962 by the “new electronic interdependence” of the technical media,⁵ that these notions find appropriate earthly life, with conditions given for identifying what is good and consciousness-expanding, as well as what is evil and destructive of personality.

Technology and Diversity of Stimulation

As early as 1937, John Cage, an important teacher of Paik’s who always pointed out the significance of McLuhan’s theses, in his *The Future of Music* was demanding “experimental music centers” in which “the new materials, oscillators, generators, apparatus for amplifying soft sounds, film phonographs etc.,” would be available—and “composers at work, using the resources of the twentieth century to make music.”⁶ His personal contacts with László Moholy-Nagy, Buckminster Fuller, and McLuhan, and his early knowledge of the manifesto on the *Art of Noise* (1913) by Luigi Russolo reinforced his belief in the constantly increasing significance of the new media and channels of communication. From the point of view of the early sixties, it was not just for Cage that Global Village meant an almost totally mediatized and automatized world that was imminent, but also for young artists and others such as the philosophers of the Frankfurt School. With regard to Paik, who was a generation younger, Cage wrote about the associated transformation of the human mind: “Your receiver is your mind.”⁷

Increasing mediatization of the environment has meant that, generally speaking, the human perception apparatus has been programmed as a receiver reacting to electronic signals. In the fifties, at the Virginia Hospital in Richmond, it was possible to show empirically during a series of tests on experimental subjects that the degree to which they can be influenced increased in proportion with the extent to which their self-perception had been disturbed by targeted exposure to stimuli. If a person, after a long period of stimulus withdrawal, is offered a few selected objects or stimuli and can voluntarily continue to perceive or use them, he will make a significant and frequent use of this possibility. The ideal for this in art history lies in a long period of being alone with a work in a room, as with Minimal Art. Conversely, as it is only rarely that there can have been complaints about poverty of stimuli in Western cultures since the fifties, continuing excess of stimuli plays a similarly important part. The more frequently a person is confronted with overkill⁸ and permanently changing stimuli, the rarer will he settle for one stimulus alone. Paik set off along this path and it was

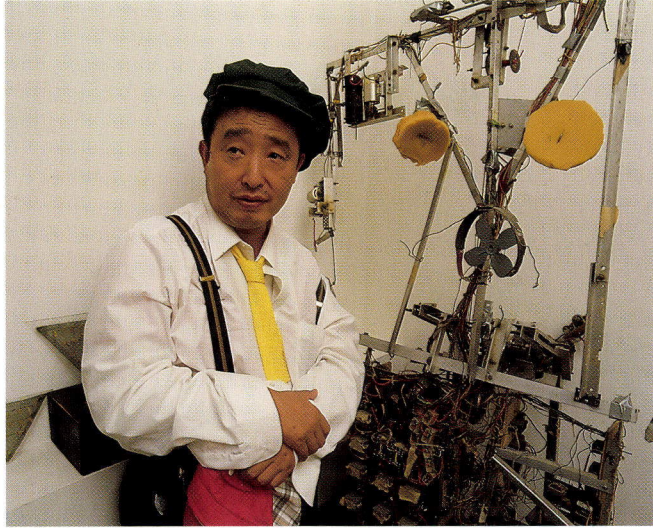
by no means in a mood of cynicism that he created a sculpture called *The More the Better* for the Olympic Games in 1988 Korea.

It is well known that the psychological and technological tendencies and facts on the subject of stimulus processing found a great response in terms of criticism of civilization. Cage, composer and student of Schoenberg, saw the prerequisite of “living anarchically”⁹ in the freedom of all people to indulge in media consumption. For example, the philosopher T. W. Adorno found the idea and reality that art should be “comfortable and detached like a hobby” a thorn in the flesh, and warned: “It would be all too easy for speculation to fall into a prestabilized harmony arranged by the world-spirit between society and works of art.”¹⁰

The clearly much older, self-appointed universal architect Buckminster Fuller, born in 1895, coined the phrase “Spaceship Earth,” which simply needed—or perhaps one should say certainly needed—a new operation manual. From Adorno’s essay *Kulturindustrie* (Culture Industry) (1947), down to Jean Baudrillard’s *Kool Killer* (1975), for example, there are numerous collapse theories that consider the compulsion to process stimuli in the “Global Village.” These show a strong urge to couple the inevitability of stimuli with big-city infrastructure,¹¹ but not yet with staying at home watching television.

Philosophy and Art

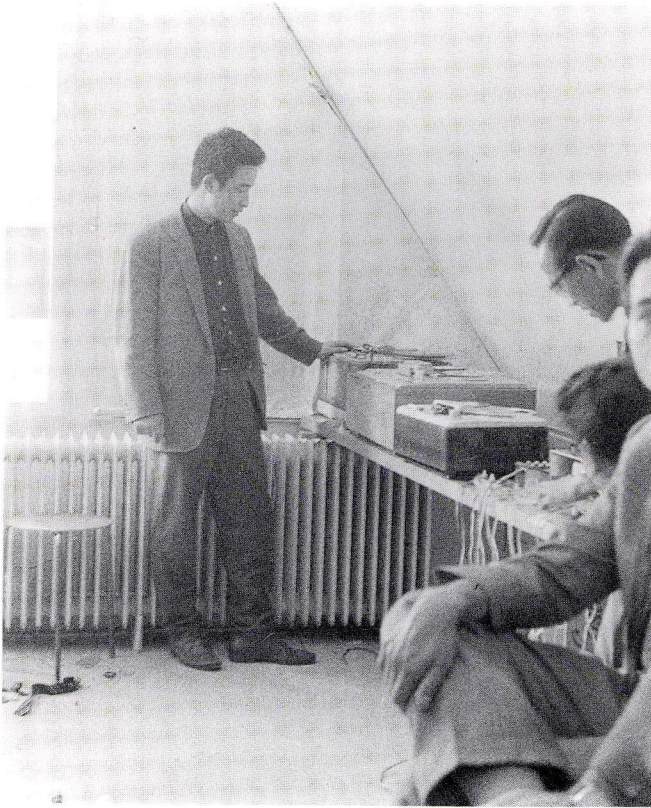
Nam June Paik, who moved from Japan to Germany in 1956 to study music and philosophy, accepted media culture in the spirit of our Western civilization as a result of his studies under Cage and other teachers, and has lived and worked often in Germany ever since. He learned his first German in Tokyo by reading through Hegel’s *Philosophy of Art* word for word, with the assistance of a dictionary. Marginal notes show how he tried to familiarize himself with Hegel’s concept of symbolic, classical, and romantic art forms, and with the ideal of the beautiful. Paik studied the history of philosophy for a term in Munich. He attended an introduction to Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, and courses entitled Development of German Philosophy Since the First World War, and History and Theories of 20th Century Art. In tandem with these he took an interest in the history of art and the history of music. For example, he participated in an exercise and seminar by Hans Sedlmayr. He then studied composition under Wolfgang Fortner in Freiburg.¹² In 1958, he came into contact with Cage and his indeterminacy theory in Darmstadt, learned the principle of chance operations and the theoretical analysis of pieces of music into equally valu-



Paik with *Robot K-456*, 1986
(Photo, Rainer Rosenow)



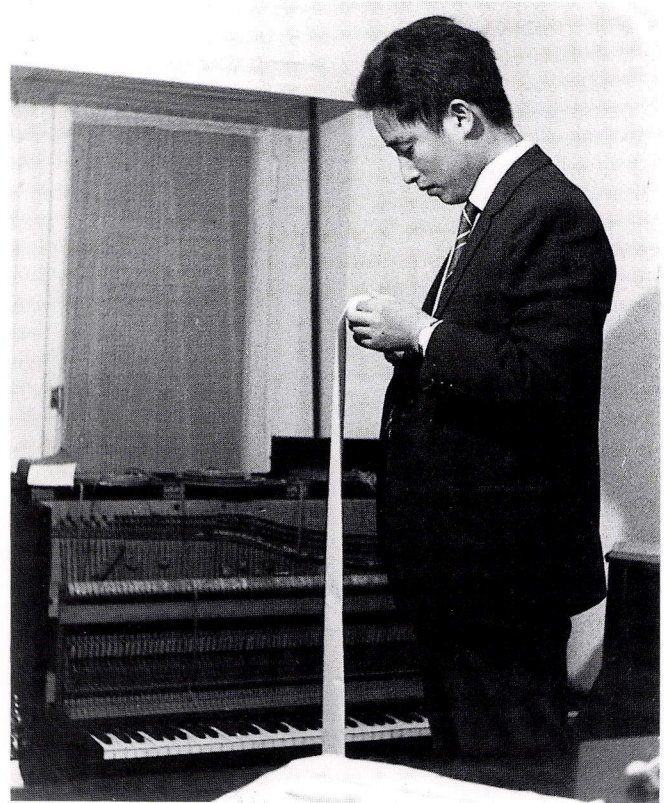
Selfportrait, 1974
Carved wood, 18 x 20 x 1"
Feelisch Collection, Remscheid



Paik in Mary Bauermeister's studio,
Cologne, June 1960
(Photo, Manfred Leve)

able parameters. Cage's influence on the International Holiday Courses in New Music was considerable not just in respect to theory, as he weaned Paik away from the goal of great musical *masterpieces*, like a representative of the Fluxus artists who were later to give concerts in Germany and New York. "I like bad art," Paik was later to say repeatedly.¹³ Cage made it clear to his pupil that musical interpretation from Bach to Schoenberg demanded an extreme degree of adaptation to all elements fixed by composers. From 1958 onward, this declaration of war on "totalitarian" composition had the effect of a pioneering perception. Looking back on two short visits to Basel and other Swiss cities which took place before and after the Darmstadt courses, Paik wrote the typical "Bagatelles Americaines." They begin: "If you are a bad composer, and if you want to write a good music—endlich [at last]—put up a stone chair in your favorite spot in Berner Oberland [in the Alps]."¹⁴

Cage's teaching on random and aleatory composition methods turned against the European fusion of sounds extending from light classical pieces to the great symphonies. To this end he performed lyrical, very musical texts in Darmstadt, which made the obsolescence of such thinking apparent as far as the modern media, changing modes of transport, and our shifting everyday percep-

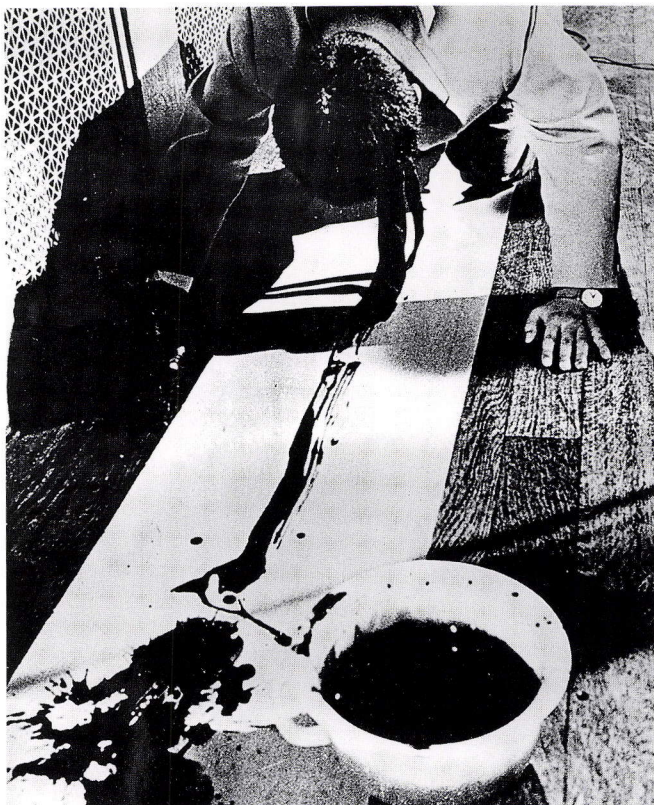


Hommage à John Cage
Aachener Strasse, Cologne, 1959
(Photo, Manfred Leve)

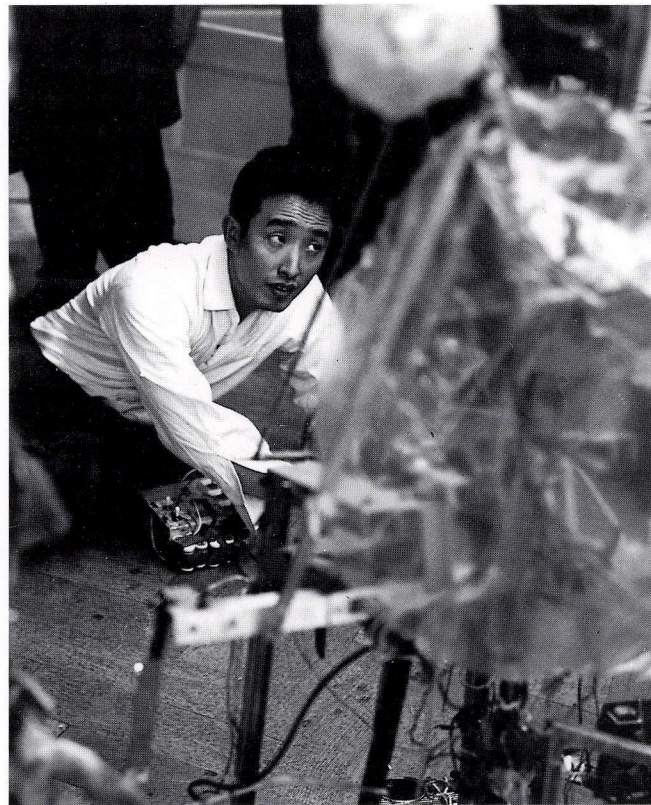
tions were concerned: "It is high time to let sounds issue in time independent of a beat in order to show a musical recognition of the necessity of time which has already been recognized on the part of broadcast communications, radio, television, not to mention magnetic tape, not to mention travel by air, departures and arrivals from no matter what point at no matter what time, not to mention telephony."¹⁵

Electronic Television and Nature

Cage, McLuhan, Buckminster Fuller, the subject of brainwashing, diversity of stimulation, the indeterminacy of life and of our communication, or the proverbial Zen wisdom of D. T. Suzuki were not the only things that engaged Paik's attention around 1960. A desk-drawer object featuring personal "rubbish" dating from 1961 includes, for example, a newspaper article on the sixtieth birthday of physicist Werner Heisenberg, reprinting his research on the innermost features of matter.¹⁶ Paik must have used this to inform himself about the unified field theory of elementary particles, about those field operators, independent of time and space, who revealed a distinction between elementary and composite parti-



Zen for Head, 1962
 Interpretation of La Monte Young's composition
Draw a straight line and follow it, 1960
 Fluxus Internationale Festspiele Neuester Musik,
 Wiesbaden



24 Stunden (24 Hours)
 Happening at the Galerie Parnass, Wuppertal,
 June 5 to June 6, 1965 (Photo, Bodo Niederprüm)
 The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection,
 Detroit

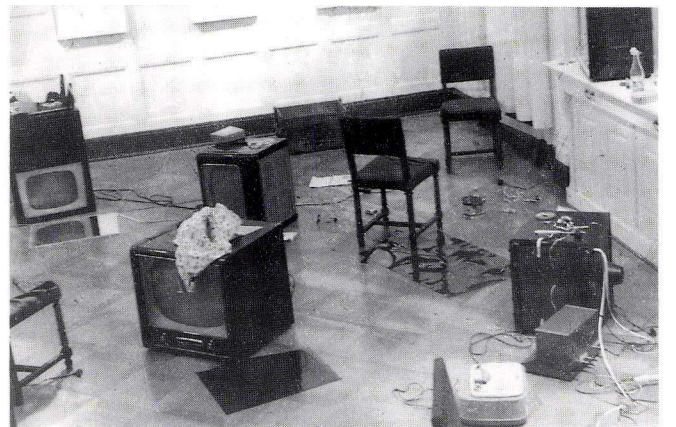
cles. Paik also studied electronics magazines independent of meetings with his artist colleagues, got hold of circuit diagrams for radio and television sets, and made—although this was not until later—a personal list of the commonest computer command abbreviations, extending from ADD (Add) and ALS (Accumulator Left Shift) to TXI (Transfer with Index Incremented). Following his work at the WDR Studio for Electronic Music in Cologne, he had subsequently familiarized himself with electronic device signal manipulation.

In 1963, for the first “television” exhibition in the history of art, still conceived as “Symphony for Twenty Rooms” and logically entitled *Exposition of Music* because of his personal closeness to the musicians and composers, he produced a theoretical text of his own.¹⁷ In this he attempted to compare the sequence of events in his television program with nature.

Picking up from Cage and his most important influence in the use of this new medium, the Informel painter Karl-Otto Götz, Paik wrote that a television image could not be controlled or fixed by the artist in any traditional sense. It was therefore “indeterministically determined.” Like the electron, it had the physical capacity to be both particle and state, corpuscle and wave. The electron, the smallest unit whose existence can be proved by human

understanding at present, is, as Paik deduced with the sarcasm of someone who has studied philosophy, “a nice box on the ears for classical dualism in philosophy since Plato.” He also stressed in the spelling that the electron is *essence AND existence, essentia AND existentia*: “The electron is the ESSENTIA as EXISTENTIA.”

Paik’s implementation of Cage’s thoughts from the Darmstadt courses, his knowledge acquired through working in the Cologne Studio for Electronic Music, and his first concert experiences in Mary Bauermeister’s studio (a painter who was living with Stockhausen at the time) for years did not lead to art objects or compositions, but much more to experiments, prognoses, and thought-games. All this could make Paik a disguised Diogenes of the late second millennium, to the extent that almost all his works in the sixties and seventies, and particularly the *Urmusik* of 1961, appeared as a plebeian antithesis to the neat arrangements of Pop and Op Art. “Germans have to suffer. They like suffering,” he told *Magnum* magazine in 1963.¹⁸



Exposition of Music, Galerie Parnass, Wuppertal,
1963
(Photo, Manfred Montwé)
Sohm Archives, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart

Exposition of Music, Galerie Parnass, Wuppertal,
1963
(Photo, Peter Brötzmann)
The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection,
Detroit

Exposition of Music, Galerie Parnass, Wuppertal,
1963
(Photo, Rolf Jährling)
The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection,
Detroit



Paik at *Exposition of Music*
Galerie Parnass, Wuppertal, 1963
(Photo, Manfred Montwé)
Sohm Archives, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart

Wolf Vostell at *Exposition of Music*
Galerie Parnass, Wuppertal, 1963
(Photo, Manfred Leve)



Paik performing *Listening to Music Through the Mouth* at *Exposition of Music*, Galerie Parnass, Wuppertal, 1963
(Photo, Manfred Montwé)
Sohm Archives, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart

Ecstasy as a Normal Condition

As follow-up to *Exposition of Music*, Paik wrote a second essay called *Nachspiel*, and introduced his *Electronic Television* for the first time in the subtitle.¹⁹ In this Paik gave his views on the categories of quality and value. He said that the essence of natural beauty is that the unlimited quantity of natural phenomena had blunted their quality. If in nature *A* is different from *B*, this does not mean (as it often does in art) that it is inevitably better than *B* as well. Like nature, his television contains a kind of physical music: “not always interesting, but not always uninteresting.” In this essay Paik went even further and risked touching upon major philosophical theories. He said that the ancient Greek theological category of ecstasy, which means rapture as well as standing outside oneself and is considered a condition rarely achieved, was a fundamental condition of existence, as a consequence of Jean-Paul Sartre’s literature and philosophy. For Sartre, one always was what one was not, or conversely, one was always not what one was. Exaggerating somewhat, Paik said about Sartre that man was always condemned to something, to be or to think, for example. For this reason, he constantly stands outside himself. The interesting thing about this observation was its result. Paik diagnosed the feeling of ecstasy in Sartre’s sense as a feeling of relativity and wrote: “They hang halfway up in the air, not very contented, but also not very discontented.”

He says that this condition again shows how his own experimental television could be perceived.²⁰ Paik’s television philosophy never aimed at Western reconciliation, the identity of the nonidentical, nor categorically at the alternative, the principle of negation, or the hypostatization of a ghettolike urban life time/space. It also did not attempt to transfer Kantian or Hegelian thinking to Hollywood or to American TV networks, and neither did it simply commend Zen to the West.²¹ Nevertheless, Paik’s advice, also added in 1963, to be content with 75 percent (then 50 percent, 38 percent, 9 percent, 0 percent, and finally with –1,000 percent) could be fully discussed. “Frustration remains frustration” was his view of Asiatic ideas of salvation, thus putting a stop to any exotic use of Far-Eastern teachings in the West.

The Enriching Feeling of Relativity

And so what have we to expect? What is this new experimental television aiming at, what is the Korean artist’s attitude to the West, what is his attitude to the East, the North, and the South, how does he see “Space-ship Earth” or our “Global Village”? Even Calvin Tomkins, the great and perhaps last narrative writer among



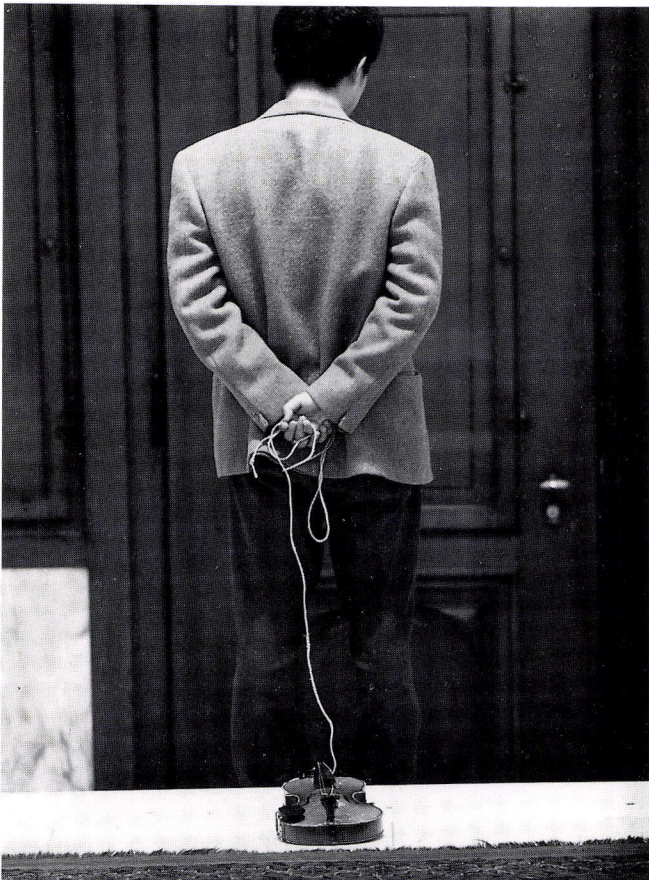
Monthly Review of University for Avantgarde Hinduism, 1963
Postcard to Wolf Vostell, postmark:
April 30, 1963
Sohm Archives, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart

Schallplattenschaschlik (Shashlik of Records), 1963
Speaker, strings, turntable records, automatic pick-up arm, wood, metal, 67x22x15”
Museum am Ostwall, Dortmund
Former Feelisch Collection



art historians in the second half of the twentieth century, observed: “No doctrinal statements, no manifestos, no fuss.”²² He described Paik’s fascination with television as an “endless kaleidoscope of shapes and colors on the screen” that he created himself, first with magnets, and then with the video synthesizer he developed with Shuya Abe. This video synthesizer made it possible to layer seven colored pictures on top of one another, as an expression of the greatest possible simultaneity and plurality. As early as 1963, Paik had wanted synchronicity of television sets with other exhibition pieces as a principle of noncausal links. But television was and remained, as McLuhan had always stressed as well,²³ a casually consumable, “cold” medium that, unlike the cinema, made possible “a continuation of one’s own life.”²⁴ Equally casually, and certainly not compulsively, it presented a means of self-experience and a means of entertaining perception of our history or our communication forms—this may also be the meaning of the passage, “See your eyes with your eye” in a 1962 reader.²⁵

Exposition of Music, Galerie Parnass, Wuppertal, 1963 (Photo, Manfred Montwé) Sohm Archives, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart



In all his comparisons between man’s culture and nature, in the course of the decades Paik has increasingly striven for a “*multitemporal, multispatial symphony*” as had been expressly realized in 1984 with the satellite program *Good Morning, Mr. Orwell*. He said that in conveying information, television no longer creates a dialectic, but a feedback, as shown in an associated catalogue essay by Paik.²⁶ It is based on human encounters, aims at further encounters, and intensifies or accelerates encounters between different cultures, without being materially tangible in this or being there as an overwhelming monument. For Paik, television transmission by satellite is on the way to becoming the “main nonmaterial product of postindustrial society.” He even wrote in 1980: “In the future, the only artwork that will survive will have no gravity at all.”²⁷ Whether as videotape at home or as an official television program, it has not only a balancing and relieving function, but functions as an instrument of enrichment in the balance of human communication on planet Earth. Life itself, or drastic events, can be neither played back nor repeated by television. But it will “enrich the synapses between the brain cells of humanity.”²⁸

Paik’s global aesthetics as a philosopher and as a television, video, and satellite artist expressly imply an ethnic romanticism aware of the dangers of “Big Brother.” The expanding world of his art slowly encroached upon the real world. With his set pieces from television programs, videotapes, and constructions of old and new design, Paik has since 1963 been following the premise of being “no longer a cook [composer], but only a *Feinkosthändler* [fine-foods merchant].”²⁹ He discovered that Orwell is so well known in English-speaking countries that he’s almost passé, and needs no further commentary. But since his novel *1984* had not been reprinted in France since the fifties, the television company had to add a fifteen-minute explanation of Orwell’s book before Paik’s New Year broadcast. “These differences made this difficult avant-garde art even more difficult.”³⁰

Thomas Kellein is Director of the Kunsthalle Basel.

NOTES

- 1 Sony markets *Sat-Art-III Trilogy with Booklet*, containing the Paik videotapes *Good Morning, Mr. Orwell*; *Bye-Bye Kipling*; and *Wrap Around the World*.
- 2 Heiner Legewie, Wolfram Ehlers, *Knaurs Moderne Psychologie*, Droemer, Munich, 1978, p. 50.
- 3 Nam June Paik, “Random Access



**Nam June Paik with Karl Otto Götz at
Exposition of Music, Galerie Parnass,
Wuppertal, 1963 (Photo, Vogelsang)**

Information,” *Artforum*, September 1,
1980, pp. 46–49.

4 Thomas Kellein, *Sputnik-Schock und
Mondlandung*, Künstlerische Großprojekte von Yves Klein bis Christo, Verlag
Gerd Hatje, Stuttgart, 1989, p. 74.

5 Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg
Galaxy*, University of Toronto Press,
1962, p. 47.

6 Richard Kostelanetz, *John Cage*,
DuMont, Cologne, 1973, p. 85.

7 John Cage, *A Year from Monday*,
Wesleyan University Press, Middletown,
1967, p. 89.

8 David Ross explains Paik’s technique
of *overkill* in the videotape *Global
Groove* (1973); see Nam June Paik
catalogue, Kölnischer Kunstverein,
Cologne, 1976, p. 115.

9 Kostelanetz, op. cit., p. 29.

10 Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische
Theorie*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 1970,
p. 350.

11 Cf. for example, Jean Baudrillard,
Kool Killer, Merve, Berlin, 1978, p. 21.

12 Cf. Fortner’s comments in the 1976
Cologne catalogue, cf. note 8, p. 38. I
obtained the previous biographical notes
by reviewing Paik’s New York archive.

13 E.g. in Australia in 1974; quoted from
1976 Cologne catalogue, see note 8,
p. 133.

14 Original manuscript in the Sohm
Archive, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart. The
piece recommends the same thing to the
“good composer” and to the “very good
composer,” as well.

15 John Cage, *Silence*, Wesleyan Uni-
versity Press, Middletown, 1961, p. 40.

16 Arts section, *Frankfurter Allgemeine
Zeitung*, 2/12/61.

17 Reprinted in 1976 Cologne catalogue;
see note 8, p. 79.

18 Cf. *Magnum*, no. 47, 1963, pp. 35–42.

19 Cologne catalogue; see note 8,
pp. 87–92.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 91.

21 Cf. *1962 Wiesbaden Fluxus 1982*,
René Block, ed., Harlekin Art, Berliner
Künstlerprogramm des DAAD, 1983,
p. 373.

22 Calvin Tomkins, “Video Visionary,”
The New Yorker, May 5, 1976, p. 44.

23 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding
Media*, New York, 1964.

24 Tomkins, op. cit., p. 45.

25 Cologne catalogue; see note 8, p. 103.

26 *Nam June Paik — Mostly Video*,
Metropolitan Arts Museum, Tokyo,
1984, p. 13.

27 See note 3, p. 49.

28 See note 26, p. 13.

29 “About the Exposition of Music”
(handwritten manuscript), Gilbert and
Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection, De-
troit, Inv. 03142.2, p. 3. I am grateful to
Jon Hendricks, New York, for permis-
sion to inspect the document.

30 See note 26, p. 12.



Paik and Karl Otto Götz in front of *Kuba TV* at *Exposition of Music*, Galerie Parnass, Wuppertal, 1963 (Photo, Manfred Leve)

Nam June Paik

NAM JUNE PAIK

EXPOSITION of music

ELECTRONIC television

11. - 20. März 1963

Wuppertal-Eberfeld, Mollseestraße 6/7, Tel. 35241

Galerie Parnass

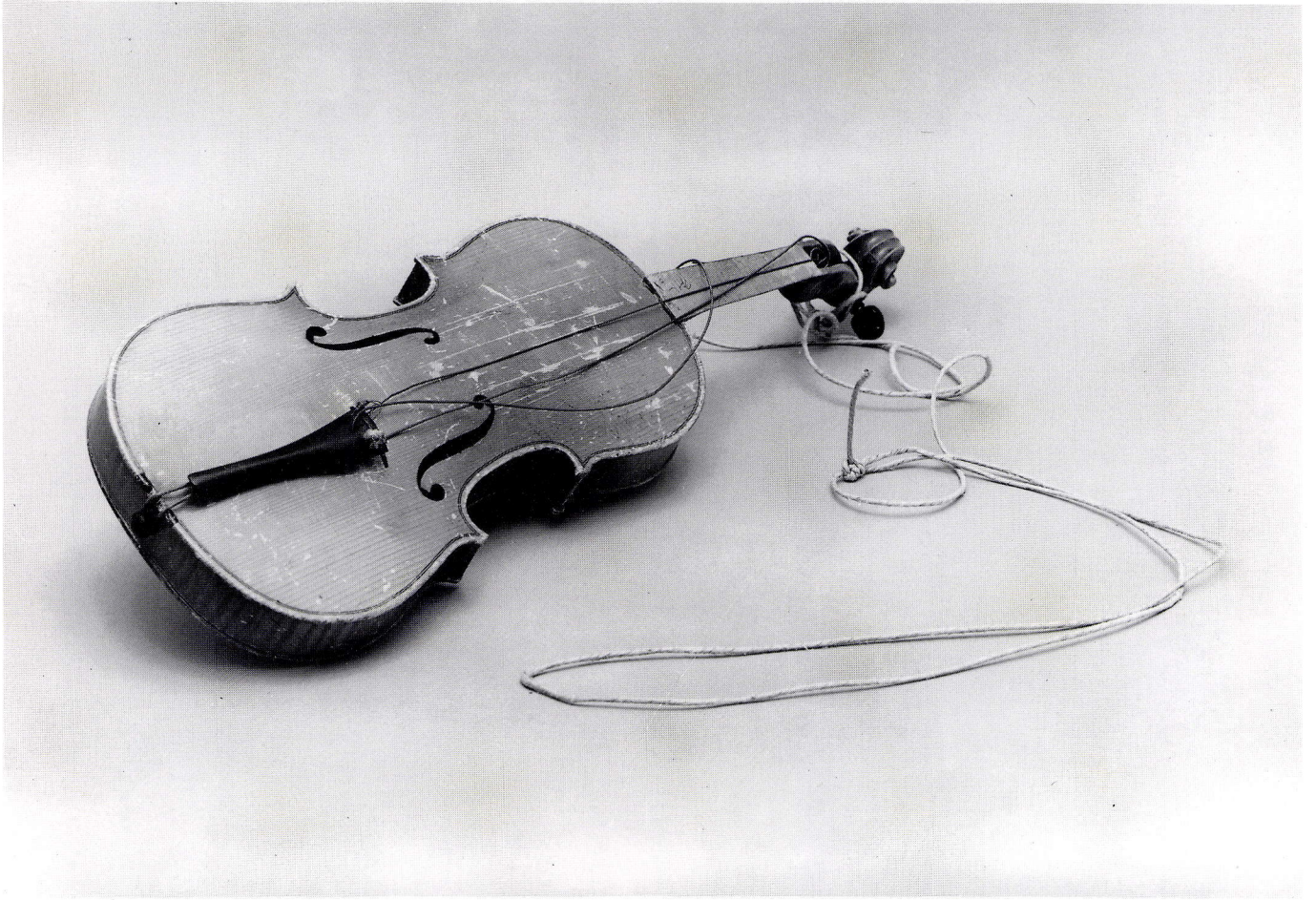
Kindergarten der -Atten-	How to be satisfied with 70%
Feticism of -idea-	Erinnerung an das 20. Jahrhundert
objets sonores	sonolized room
Instruments for Zen-exercise	Prepared W.C.
Bagatelles américaines etc.	que sais-je?
Do it your ...	HOMMAGE à Rudolf Augstein
Freigegeben ab 18 Jahre	Synchronisation als ein Prinzip akausaler Verbindungen
Is the TIME without contents possible?	A study of German idiotology etc.

HAUFREDE MONTWE PETER BRÖTZMANN

Artistic Collaborators: Thomas Schmitt, Frank Trowbridge, Günther Schmitz, M. Zenzen
Technic: Günther Schmitz, M. Zenzen

Paik at *Exposition of Music*, Galerie Parnass, Wuppertal, 1963 (Photo, Rolf Jährling) The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection, Detroit





Violin with String, 1961
22x7x25"
Museum Moderner Kunst Ludwig Foundation,
Vienna
Former Hahn Collection

SONATINE FOR GOLDFISH

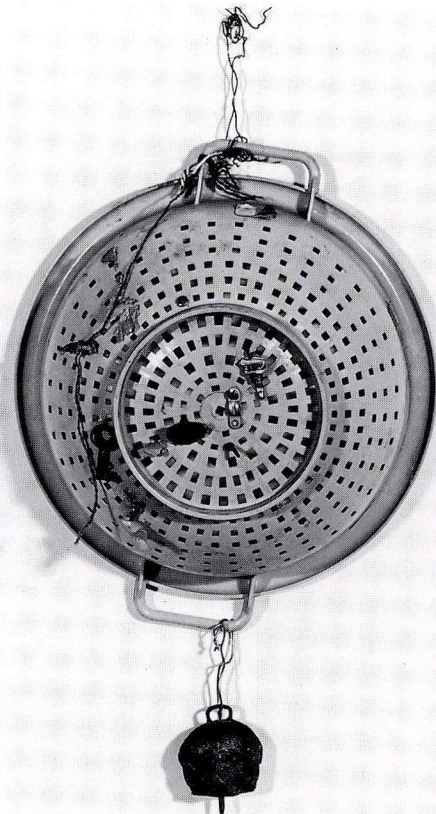
“I’ve got a hangover from music. It looks as though I could handle a music videotape better than someone with a visual arts background. I think that I understand time and processes, kinetics, better than a video artist with a visual background.”¹ The difference between music and fine art that Nam June Paik established here for his video work can also be applied to his earlier objects. Heinz-Klaus Metzger has already attacked the all-too-one-sided reception of Paik’s work as too narrowly labeled “Fluxus” and “Happening,” and pointed out Paik’s origins as a musician. He wrote that “the Happening was a particularly suitable format for Paik to the extent that Happenings overturned conventional artistic genres and also brought together, rather than separated, forms of art and other life activity as different as music, defecation, cooking, and suicide. But at the same time, there can be a problem with placing Paik in this framework, because everything he’s ever created or exhibited from the outset, or will exhibit, negates division of genres. His is not that decisive or precise Happening moment of violating a given art field. His whole career has been built on the unexpected, the incomparable shocks synonymous with the name Paik.”²

In the case of Fluxus, it’s not just that everything is in flux, but also that anything is possible. Extremely influential in its day, Fluxus as a reservoir for new ideas provided not only a setting for agitation and rebellion against many social and cultural boundaries—it also led to a leveling of previous norms. What was subsumed under the Fluxus flow also became the starting point for changes that were in part very divergent. But when boundaries are crossed, new limits must be set—because if anything/everything is let in, there are no new boundaries to defy.

So when considering Nam June Paik as an artist and phenomenon, one must always keep an eye on his starting point, his origins: music. “Only when it is not seen as performance art, theater, demonstration or the like, but steadfastly perceived as music can Paik’s composition be understood for what it is: music that breaks with the concept of music.”³ Resistance to Paik’s early work in particular—which, thanks to the acquisition of the Wolfgang Hahn collection in 1978 can be studied

more fully than anywhere else in Vienna’s Museum Moderner Kunst—was due mainly to this very discrepancy between the intellectual origin—music, the art from which this Paik work sprang—and the strict, compartmental organization of an art museum. Objects like *Urmusik* (1961), *Klavier Integral* (1958–63), *Zen for Touching*, *Violin with String*, *Zen for Walking* (all 1961), but also *Zen for TV* (1963–75), *Majestic*, or *Sonatine for Goldfish* (both 1975) cannot be understood if limited to the classification of modern sculpture—even if presented strikingly in a full-scale museum exhibition. The starting

Zen for Touching, 1961
Plastic colander with bell, wires, and bolts
15 x 9 x 3”
Museum Moderner Kunst Ludwig Foundation,
Vienna
Former Hahn Collection



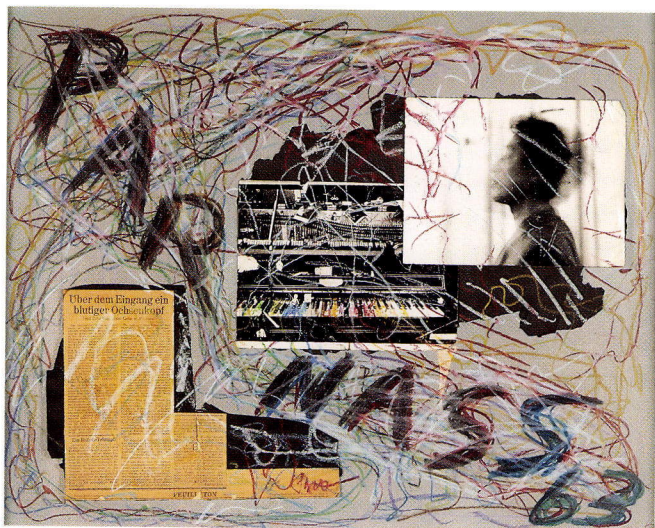
point for Nam June Paik's work is clearly and unambiguously in the realm of music, not sculpture.

However, presentation of these Paik works in a museum can be more than justified: Paik has broken up and thus extended the concept of music and thrust forward into fields that were occupied at the same time by fine artists working on dismantling and redefining the concepts *picture* and *sculpture*. And one of these areas was *Fluxus Island in Decollage Ocean*, as Paik entitled a poster he drew in 1963.

A native of Korea, Paik studied aesthetics, music, and art history in Tokyo, wrote a graduation paper on Arnold Schoenberg, and after 1965, continued his studies in Munich, Darmstadt, Freiburg, and Cologne, meeting Luigi Nono, Wolfgang Fortner, John Cage, David Tudor, and Karlheinz Stockhausen, among others. Fortner was soon to notice Paik's tendency to find traditional musical forms inadequate, and recommended that he work at the WDR Studio for Electronic Music in Cologne. In a reference furnished to help Paik obtain a grant, Fortner confirmed not only Paik's "solid study of the craft of music" and "flawless technique in traditional composition," but also an interest "in noise and sound production problems as demonstrated by Pierre Schaeffer in Paris and the American composer Cage. This produces interesting experiments in organizing sounds and noises which by their very nature cannot be directly assessed from the point of view of composition. The relationship of these experiments to actual composition is not unlike that of photomontage to actual painting. There are occasions on which the application of such experiments can be most meaningful in the practical field of theater, radio plays, and sound films, but it cannot be assessed by the categories valid in the narrow sense within the European tradition of composition."⁴

The collage principle, the combining of all kinds of different materials, is not only an essential element of fine

art in our century, but—at least since John Cage—of music as well. For Cage, music was not limited to sounds produced by traditional musical instruments; he sees all sounds as potentially capable of integration. Cage responded to the question of whether this was still "music" in 1937 in his lecture *The Future of Music*. "If this word *music* is sacred and reserved for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century instruments, we can substitute a more meaningful term: *organization of sound*."⁵ In 1938, John Cage composed *Bacchanale*, his first piece for a prepared piano: a variety of objects (screws, pieces of wood, foam rubber, etc.) were inserted among the piano strings, thus broadening the instrument's sound potential. A year later he wrote *Imaginary Landscape No. 1* for dummy piano, cymbals, and various records played on several turntables. Later, recording tape and radio were added, with chance playing a major role. In the case of the pieces for radio, the sounds were not recorded on tape, but presented live. The receiver becomes a transmitter, a sound instrument for which the duration and intensity but not the sound itself can be determined. The composer thus shapes not so much the sounds themselves as their duration. Sound-art becomes time-art, and the nonsounds (silence) are equally important as the sounds. In 1952, Cage created *Waiting*: one and a half minutes of silence at the beginning, over half the total duration, and even then, the pauses are longer than the few sounds that interrupt them. In *4'33"*, dating from the same year, there are no sounds left at all: four minutes and thirty-three seconds of silence. Robert Rauschenberg, with whom Cage was working on various projects at the time, had just created his monochrome, pure-white pictures, intended to be shaped by the visitor's shadows alone—in other words by what was usually a disturbance. Just as here the surrounding space, the spatial context in which the picture is placed, the fact of being looked at became the actual subject, in the same way that Cage made the





Sonatine for Goldfish, 1975
Console television with picture tube replaced by
fish bowl and goldfish, 15 x 31 x 16"
Museum Moderner Kunst Ludwig Foundation,
Vienna
Former Hahn Collection

*Parnass 63 (Über dem Eingang ein blutiger
Ochsenkopf/Over the Entrance a Bloody
Oxhead)*,
1963/1987
Collage and drawing, 22 x 28"
Private Collection, Wuppertal

24 Stunden (24 Hours), 1965/1987
Collage and drawing, 22 x 28"
Private Collection, Wuppertal

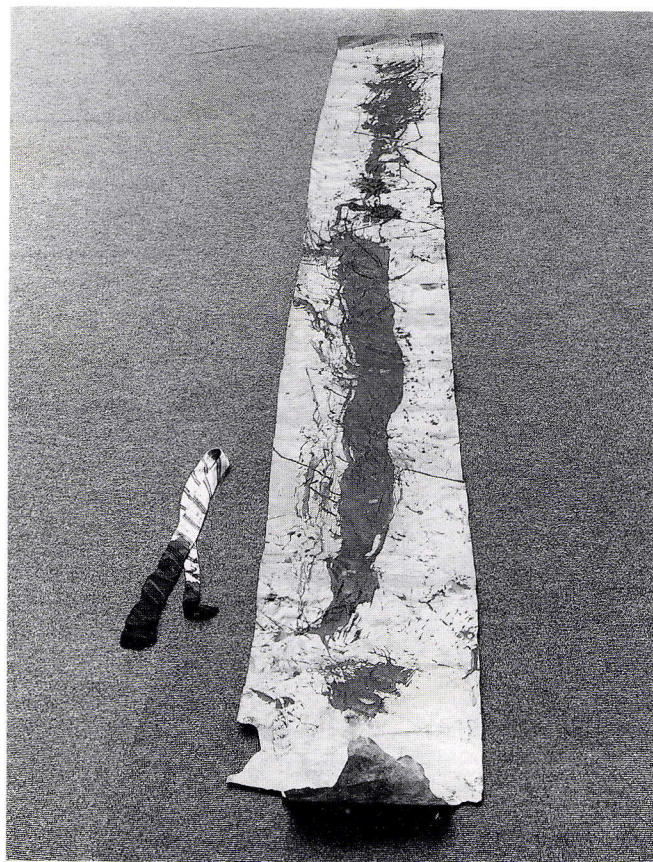
spatial, temporal, and acoustical conditions of musical presentation absolute. Noises made by the audience—coughs, throat-clearing, or just breathing and heartbeats—were no longer disturbances, but became part of the music.

Paik was lastingly influenced by the works and person of John Cage. In 1959 he developed his *Hommage à John Cage*. Ernst Thomas gave this firsthand report: “In this ‘music’ for tape recorders and piano the most bizarre things happen in five minutes: there are howls of electronic noise, eggs splash against the wall, a motorbike clatters off, a musical box tinkles, the radio blares out political news, Paik plays Czerny-like exercises on the piano, a rosary flies past my head, an old piano has to produce its last sounds on strings that have been torn out, then it is hurled over with a thunderous noise; suddenly there is silence and complete darkness, and finally Paik’s unyielding face, illuminated by a stump of candle. The working formula is: collage and montage.”⁶

In Cage’s case as well, tampering with the piano didn’t just produce a change of sound. Since the instrument was often worked on and altered during the concert, the event became a visual experience as well. “Working on the instrument was fascinating visually. This wasn’t music to listen to with your eyes shut,” said Dieter Schnebel, who labeled it “visual music.”⁷ Paik radically extended these starts made by Cage, which then led inevitably to the visualization of music. In 1963, at Rolf Jährling’s Galerie Parnass in Wuppertal, Paik presented his *Exposition of Music*. Tomas Schmit, Paik’s collaborator at the time, said it was “more like a performance, a potential performance,” since gallery visitors were encouraged to handle Paik’s work and, said Schmit, “they eagerly participated—it was very exciting. Incidentally, the equipment used to enhance the piano was by no means put in place ahead of time. We were still fiddling around with things during the exhibition. Some of the improvised fittings were deliberately rather delicate and had to be replaced—or simply eliminated—so the spirit behind creating the pianos was driven by spontaneity and free randomness.”⁸ The only one of these piano works to have survived is the *Klavier Integral*. Paik played it in public for the last time in his 1976 retrospective in the Kunstverein Cologne. “Today, this work is a museum piece that cannot (may not) be used any longer, is probably beyond restoration, and yet has a great deal of appeal as a relic, a primeval fossil,”⁹ as Wulf Herzogenrath pointed out. Relegation to museums has caused Paik’s work of this genre to be withdrawn from use (not only *Klavier Integral*; also *Urmusik*, *Zen for...*, and *Violin with String*, among others) and reduced to their still-life appearance only. It’s possible to imagine how they’d be in action, but to envision the full range of possibilities, we rely on firsthand reports such as this one from Tomas Schmit:



Philco, 1974
Radio with mini-television and antenna,
16x13x13"
Louisiana, Humlebaek (Photo, Eric Pollitzer)





Zen for Walking, 1961

Two sandals with carved stone head, bell,
and chains, 35 x 3 x 5"

(Photo, Rolf Jährling)

Museum Moderner Kunst Ludwig Foundation,
Vienna

Former Hahn Collection

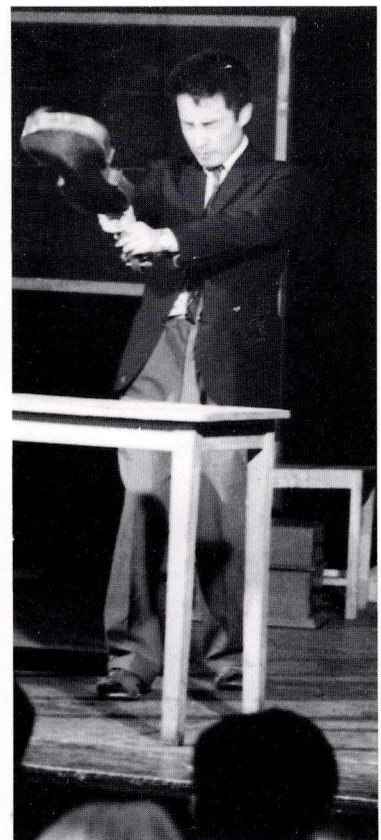
Zen for Head, 1962

Ink and tomato on paper (160 x 14")

Ink and tie (50 x 23")

Städtisches Museum Wiesbaden

Paik doing
a violin solo
raised it very slowly (about 5 min)
in concentrated manner & then
BANG!



Paik performing *One for Violin Solo*

Kammerspiele Düsseldorf, June 16, 1962

(Photo and writing at the back by George Maciunas)

Sohm Archives, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart

“I press a key, the key moves the hammer, and that moves whatever is stuck on to or is hanging from it; for example, it makes an old shoe dangling over a lid bob up and down.

– I press a key, and it presses on a squeak-bag underneath it; or an electric switch: the switches are of three kinds, like single buttons, toggle, and double switches, examples:

– If I press C sharp, a transistor radio is switched on; it goes off as soon as I release the C sharp.

– If I press F, an electric motor screwed to the sound-board (!) starts to rumble; it stops again when the F is pressed for a second time.

– If I press the C, a fan heater starts to blow warm air at my legs, the knob that switches it off again is hidden under the A.

As well as the things that have been mentioned, several transistor radios, one or more film projectors, a siren (and other things?) are operated in this way.

One key switches off all the lighting in the room (and on again, provided you can find the thing in the dark).

Otherwise, on these two pianos you can see, move, use: a doll’s head, a hand siren, a cow’s horn, a plume, barbed wire, a spoon, a tower of pfennig pieces piled on top of each other, all kinds of toys, photographs, a brassiere, an accordion, an aphrodisiac tin, a pick-up arm from a record player, a padlock, a loose key, lever, etc., etc.”¹⁰

If one of Paik’s objections—namely questioning traditional modes of behavior and expectations by means of shock, and in this way pushing through to the heart of things—can also be understood in terms of inanimate objects (“The piano is a taboo, It must be destroyed”¹¹), two of what are probably the most essential elements of his art are missing: time and variability. Paik has always changed his works, used parts for new works, adapted ideas. Even in the presentation of old works he has not “clung slavishly or even retrospectively to old forms, or even bothered about the ‘authenticity’ of the first appearance, but about the best possible execution at a particular time,”¹² writes Herzogenrath. In this way Paik also identifies a dilemma common to museums of modern art, and shakes one of their “taboos” without (so far?) having been able to get rid of it: The “destroyed” piano is presented, and thus the thoughts that led to it, and the possible lessons to be learned can be drawn from it, but not implemented. Audience participation, which was one of Paik’s fundamental interests (“As to the next step toward more indeterminacy, I wanted to let the audience [or museumgoers in this case] act and play itself”¹³), is prevented by the museum’s intrinsic preservationist role—its obligation to retain the most authentic record possible.

One part of the Wuppertal exhibition, the visualized musical instruments, or *Exposition of Music*, was for its time the next, logical step in Paik’s deconstruction of the traditional understanding of music. The second part of the presentation, *Electronic Television*, “is today rightly counted as a milestone in the history of video art. Despite the diversity and differing impact of the objects displayed, the television sets exhibited were dominant in that they created a basis for the video works that later led in various directions. Thus, technically speaking, *Zen for TV* developed into *TV Clock*, and the sets with microphone and foot switch were the genesis of various forms of *Participation TV*,”¹⁴ as Edith Decker pointed out. Chronieler Tomas Schmit had the following to say about the television installations:

“The basic content is whatever television program happens to be on the air at that moment, but it is scarcely discernible as such on most of the sets. (The various complicated modifications that Paik had done to the inner organs of the TVs are not comprehensible to the lay person or to me; I’ll attempt to describe the results.) One of the televisions shows a negative running picture; in one case the picture is rolled into a cylinder around the vertical axis of the screen.

In another case it is modulated around the horizontal. In what Paik says is the most complicated case, three independent sinusoidal curves chivy at the parameters of the picture.

In group of two: the lower one is striped horizontally, the upper one is striped vertically (the upper one shows the same picture as the lower one, but it’s on its side, not on its feet).

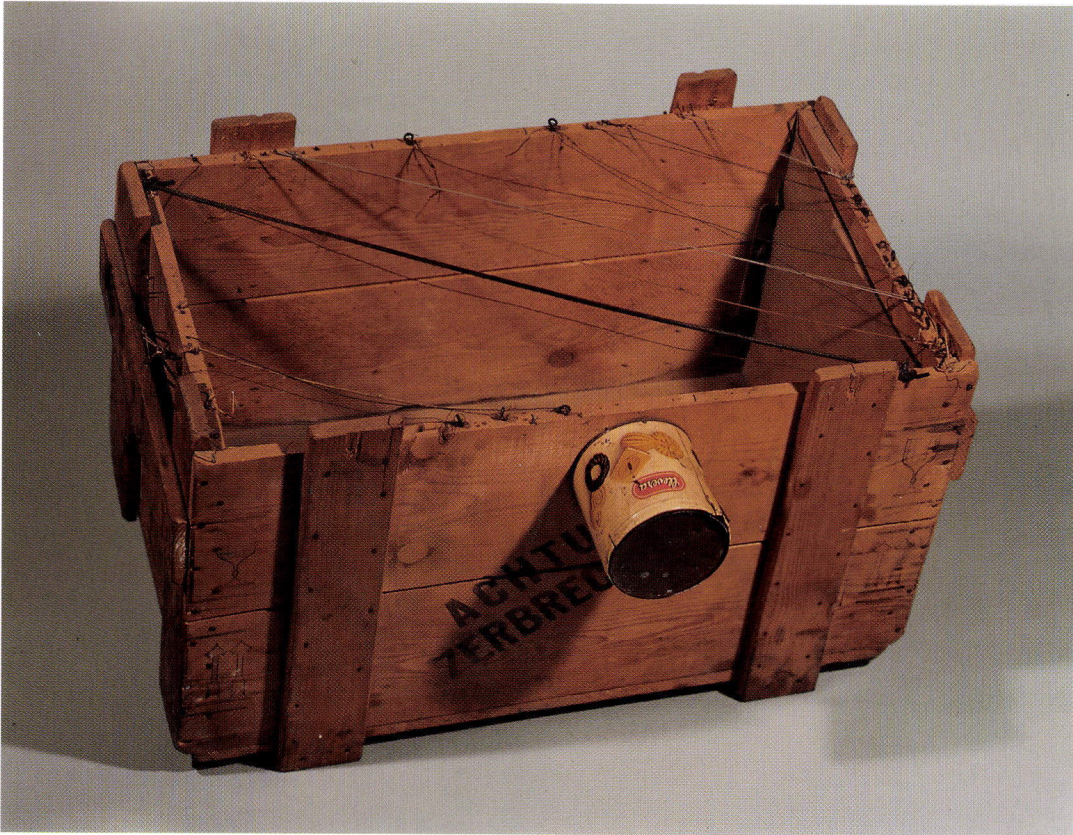
In the case of *Zen TV*, a single vertical white line runs across the center of the screen.

One TV lies on its face and shows its program to the floor (Paik today: ‘It was broken’).

In the upper eight TVs, the form of the picture (for television one says *picture* for a picture existing in time as well!) is derived from partially fixed manipulation of the electronics of the set. With the lower four screens, the manipulations are such that each picture is determined or influenced by material fed in from the outside. One is connected to a foot switch in front of it; when pressed, short circuits from the contact procedure make a firework display of points of light that shower across the screen, then disappear immediately. One is connected to a microphone; if someone speaks into it, he sees a similar, but this time continuous, firework display of dots.

Cuba TV goes the furthest; it is connected to a tape recorder that feeds music into it (and us). The parameters of the music determine the parameters of the picture.

Finally (on the top floor), comes *One Point TV*, con-



Urmusik, 1961
 Wooden crate with tin can, wires, and strings,
 20 x 36 x 26"
 Museum Moderner Kunst Ludwig Foundation, Vienna
 Former Hahn Collection
 (Photo, Whitney Museum of American Art catalogue, 1982)

nected to a radio. It shows a bright spot in the middle of the screen, and its size is related to the volume of the program; if it gets louder, the image gets larger; if it gets softer, it gets smaller."¹⁵

Even if this presentation of manipulated televisions had a lasting influence on actual video art, and especially on video installations, they should not be considered, as Edith Decker asserts, as "a group of works independent of music."¹⁶ Even the sentence by Paik from the exhibition information leaflet quoted by her that "electronic television is not a mere application and extension of electronic music into the field of optics"¹⁷ cannot be seen as proof of the independence of the televisions from Paik's music, or more concretely, from Paik's view of music. For when in the sentence quoted Paik goes on to write, "but it is much more that they represent a contrast with electronic music (at least in its first stage), showing a fixed, determined tendency in both its serial compositional method and also in its ontological form (for the repetition of destined recordings on tape),"¹⁸ he also

identified one of the differences between traditional (even though it had only been developed a short time ago) electronic music and his own musical performances. And the hallmarks of these were visualization, variability, and participation: composition, performance, and audience form a unit in his music.

Another characteristic of Nam June Paik's art is his swinging between extreme simplicity and a high degree of technical effort. Shortly after he created *Urmusik* in 1962, he conceived a piano concerto in which the left-hand part was to be played in San Francisco, and the right hand part played simultaneously in Shanghai. "This idea came a little too early to be carried out, but shows how advanced and well-informed Paik's thinking was, as the first television transmission by satellite between America and Europe by Telstar 2 was in July 1962."¹⁹ And at the same time that he presented the technically lavish video installations, Paik created the contemplative *Sonatine for Goldfish*. The multimonitor installations further reinforce the pictorial opulence of Paik's videotapes. "The

speed of the changing pictorial information produces a flood of heterogeneous pictorial motifs which, as they can scarcely be classified in terms of content, have a hypnotic and sedative effect on the viewer as soon as he involves himself in the pictorial events," writes Edith Decker. Again, analogies with music are seen. "The rhythm of the editing, not the motifs of the individual pictorial sequence, determines this seeing experience that can be classified as Visual Music."²⁰ The flood of pictures and information produced by the new techniques creates a lack of orientation and a leveling down of each individual piece of information: "The malaise of our time is the difficult balance in the relationship of input and output. According to statistics, we have to subject ourselves to forty thousand commercials a year, but we can only afford to buy the goods extolled in forty spots. To counter all this talk coming in at us, we go and lie down on the psychiatrist's couch and, in turn, spill out our talk there."²¹

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NOTES

- 1 Nam June Paik, *Global Groove*, interview in *Cantrill Filmnotes No. 20*, Melbourne, Australia, 1974, quoted from: *Nam June Paik, Werke 1946-1976, Musik-Fluxus-Video*, catalogue on the exhibition in the Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne, 1976, p. 133.
- 2 Heinz-Klaus Metzger, "Paiks Musik als Musik"; cf. catalogue, note 1, p. 34.
- 3 Cf. catalogue, note 1, p. 35.
- 4 Cf. catalogue, note 1, p. 38.
- 5 John Cage, *Silence*, Middletown (CN), 1979, p. 3.
- 6 Ernst Thomas, "Weltmusik mit 'Avantgarde'" in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 22, 1960; cf. catalogue, note 1, p. 43.
- 7 Dieter Schnebel, *Denkbare Musik*, Cologne, 1972, p. 310.
- 8 Tomas Schmit, "exposition of Music"; cf. catalogue, note 1, p. 69. [Initial caps added in English translation of quotes; Schmit's German original uses lower-case letters only, including on his own name and all other proper nouns.]
- 9 Wulf Herzogenrath, *Nam June Paik, Fluxus-Video*, Munich, 1983, p. 19.
- 10 Schmit, cf. note 8, p. 68.
- 11 "Nam June Paik," Interview with

- Gottfried Michael König, in: *Magnum*, Nr. 47, April 1963, special issue *Experimente*; cf. catalogue, note 1, p. 51.
- 12 Herzogenrath, cf. note 9, p. 10.
- 13 Nam June Paik, "About the Exposition of the Music," in: *Décollage*, no. 3, 1962, no page; quoted from: Edith Decker, *Paik Video*, Cologne, 1988, p. 61.
- 14 Decker, cf. note 13, p. 39.
- 15 Schmit, cf. note 8, pp. 69 ff.
- 16 Decker, cf. note 13, p. 38.
- 17 Decker, cf. note 13, p. 61.
- 18 Cf. catalogue, note 1, p. 79.
- 19 Edith Decker, "Boten und Botschaften einer telematischen Kultur," in: Edith Decker, Peter Weibel, eds., *Vom Verschwinden der Ferne, Telekommunikation und Kunst*, Cologne, 1990, p. 98.
- 20 Decker, cf. note 13, p. 188.
- 21 Cf. catalogue, note 1, p. 111.

Film-Maker's Cinematheque presents

CHARLOTTE MOORMAN playing
"OPERA SEXTRONIQUE"
by NAM JUNE PAIK

with TAKEHISA KOSUGI and JUD YALKUT

also

MAX MATTHEWS "International Lullaby"
JAMES TENNEY "Phases"
TAKEHISA KOSUGI "Organic Music"
YALKUT - PAIK "Cinema Metaphysique"
NAM JUNE PAIK "Variations on a Theme by Saint Saens"

masque design - ELY RAMAN
gen. assistance - BOB DUNHAM
photography - PETER MOORE

After three emancipations in 20th century music, (serial-indeterministic, actional)...
I have found that there is still one more chain to lose... that is

PRE-FREUDIAN HYPOCRISY

Why is sex a predominant theme in art and literature prohibited ONLY in music?
How long can New Music afford to be sixty years behind the times and still claim to be a
serious art?

The purge of sex under the excuse of being "serious" exactly undermines the so-called
"seriousness" of music as a classical art, ranking with literature and painting.

Music history needs its D.H. Lawrence its Sigmund Freud.

FEBRUARY 9, 1967 * 9 PM * 41st ST THEATER * 125 W 41st ST * NYC
by invitation only

Promotional flyer for *Opera
Sextronique*

An Artist in the Courtroom*

“After three emancipations in 20th Century music (serial, indeterministic, actional)... I have found that there is still one more chain to lose, that is: PRE-FREUDIAN HYPOCRISY.

“Why is sex a predominant theme in art and literature prohibited ONLY in music? How long can New Music afford to be sixty years behind the times and still claim to be a serious art? The purge of sex under the excuse of being ‘serious’ exactly undermines the so-called ‘seriousness’ of music as a classical art, ranking with literature and painting.

“Music history needs its D. H. Lawrence, its Sigmund Freud.”
Nam June Paik

My artistic ideals, integrity and freedom were arrested on February 9, 1967 by the police of New York City and were prosecuted in a four-day trial before a criminal court! I could not then, and still cannot, believe that such a thing is possible.

(...)

On the evening of February 9, Nam June Paik and I were performing his then new work *Opera Sextronique* before two hundred invited patrons of the arts who respected and wanted to see our work, when an army of *uninvited* policemen abruptly interrupted and raided the performance.

(...)

1 (Act I) of *Opera Sextronique* begins in complete darkness—two to three minutes of silence—then a Buddhist gong recording begins (Eihiji’s Morning Ceremony... a spectacular discovery made by U.S. musicologists), symbolizing *the transience of versatile life*. In accordance with these gongs, Paik, by remote control, flashed on and off intermittently and rhythmically in the auditorium the *Electric Bikini* I was wearing—a three-piece “light bikini” ingeniously contrived of triangles filled with 45 six-volt bulbs—representing the eternal beauty of womanhood. I walked very slowly, as in a Japanese Noh play, to my chair and began to play Paik’s variations of Massenet’s “Elegie” (Takehisa Kosugi then flashed the lights, while Paik played the piano accompaniment). The beauty of romantic music and the beauty of woman are combined through the electronic bikini and only makes everything more poetic (not lewd or obscene). In this aria,



Alain Mèrot Eustache Le Sueur
Melpomène, Erato, et Polymnie, circa 1650
Musée du Louvre, Paris

Paik modernized Buddhism, beautified the electronic age, and criticized the commercialized so-called Sex Revolution, and sublimated it into the level of Faust/Freud/Lawrence.

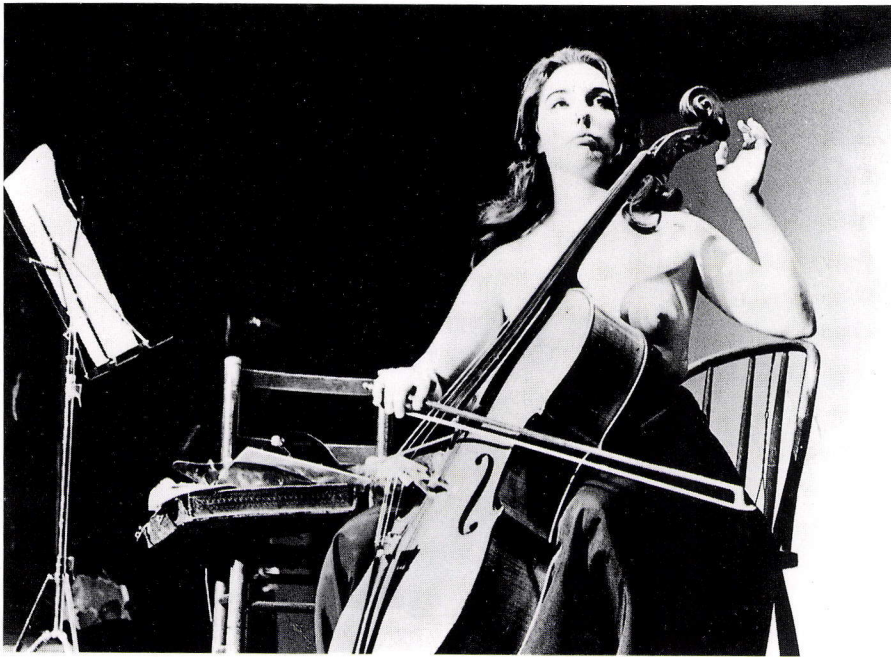
(...)

The next Aria No. 2 (Act II) is a typical example of Media Art. There are four basic elements in this section of the Opera: 1) computer music “International Lullaby,” by Max Matthews of Bell Laboratories, in which a computer analyzes two lullabies (one Japanese and one Schubert) and changes from one to the other with the *probabilistic progressis* rule; 2) live Greek female torso sitting still at a cello, seminude in a long, formal black skirt; 3) six kinds of masks, ranging from a gas mask to Picasso-type plastic mask, four kinds of prepared bows, and propellers (attached to my breasts in the last phrase) which symbolized American “pop art”; 4) the well-known Brahms “Lullaby,” arranged into variations for cello and piano by Paik. These four elements occur simultaneously—like feedback of Radio Free Europe and Radio Peking. As a whole, it is contrasts and combinations of the real and unreal, true

and false, and natural and unnatural, by means of a cello, piano, actions, costumes, taped music, and a partially nude female. Of course, each is an integral part of the composition; a part of the total structure, *indicated in the score by its creator*, Nam June Paik. After “International Lullaby,” Paik and I played a phrase of his variations on Brahms, then stopped; I changed to a different mask. Then we played another phrase, etc. So praising the beauty of womanhood (partially nude cellist) as contrasted to the falsity of life (i.e., through masks) is by no means intended to be lewd and, of course, is not lewd. These works should not be performed in clothing other than specified by Paik, since they would then be different compositions from those created by the composer—*such a censorship would constitute a compromise with artistic requirements*. This mixed-media is Marshall McLuhan itself, and it was most appreciated by the audience.

(...)

Moorman was arrested briefly. Her court trial took place a few months later. While sitting in jail, I kept wondering: Why had I been arrested? Was I being



Charlotte Moorman at the opening of *documenta 6*, Kassel, 1977 (Photo, Ludwig Winterhalter)



Charlotte Moorman with *TV Cello* during the exhibition *Projekt '74*, Cologne (Photo, Hanns Sohm)





TV Bra for Living Sculpture with Charlotte Moorman, Cologne, 1970
(Photo, Hanns Sohm)

prosecuted for having the courage to carry out a vital, new artistic experiment? The psychological phenomenon of not accepting the unfamiliar has been an undying battle in dance, art, literature, and music for centuries, but seldom (except under Hitler and the Soviet tyranny of the thirties) were artists treated like criminals and jailed for their artistic beliefs.

Was it because of my partial nudity? It is quite disturbing that I am being condemned for appearing seminude forty years after Marcel Duchamp totally undressed in Paris for a piece called "Relâche" by Eric Satie. And in October 1922, when Isadora Duncan danced barefoot before a Boston audience, Mayor Curley issued an order barring her from further appearances. She answered: "All Puritan vulgarity centers in Boston," and that "to expose one's body is art; to conceal it is vulgar."¹ Nudity has always been extremely important to art; it represents the most familiar and honest thing that we all have in common. The nude is one of art's oldest images and symbols.

(...)

Robot Opera, 1965
Paik and Moorman trying in vain to perform in front of the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, 1965
(Photo, Jürgen Müller-Schneck)

Tuesday, May 9, was Judgment Day. Judge Shalleck, who had seemed to be sympathetic to my case, found me GUILTY of indecent exposure and convicted me with a suspended sentence. In a lengthy opinion of over one hundred thousand words, Judge Shalleck expounded on underground "happenings" and his unfamiliarity with and nonacceptance of twentieth-century avant-garde art forms; topless shopping on Fifth Avenue; fashions of Rudi Gernreich, Yves St. Laurent, and Mary Quant; art works of classicists and modernists (Gauguin, Renoir, Matisse, and Degas!); Pablo Casals "performing nude"; instructions for the indecent exposure of the hands; his contempt for penniless "bearded, bathless, 'beats'" who inhabit Greenwich Village and other out places; the reasons why the new statute exempts performers while Judge Shalleck does not; his inability to find representations of topless cellists in the past works of art; his years spent in the South Pacific and their dress and the manly drink Kava—"a native drink which very few of our sack-clothed, open-toe-sandaled, *draft-card burning* 'long hairs' would dare even try." The judge also discussed the issues in the case.

Following are excerpts from the opinion, and replies to the contentions made in them. I cannot discuss the strictly legal assertions and holdings in the opinion, which I understand are also open to serious question, since their challenge is Mr. Rosenberger and Mr. Cahn's² proper function, not mine.

DECISION: "The pristine beauty of human female breasts has been immortalized by painters and sculptors and writers of poetry and prose... in the literary arts, too, descriptive allusions to the fullness of the female figure conjure up the image of its beauty... But in no prose respected by the test of time have I read, in no valued oil, in no statue or bust accepted for its imagery, technique, and beauty as art, have I seen, either visually described or portrayed, a picture of a nude or 'topless' cellist in the act of playing that instrument. I wonder if anyone has. Perhaps, then, the breast in these latter milieus is not artful. Would not someone through the years, somewhere in this mundane orb of ours have discovered such a treasure?..."

ANSWER: The creation and validity of a work of art, of course, is not dependent upon the existence of a previous or similar work. If art were to be judged on this basis, the world would never have any new work; we would still be painting animals on the walls of caves, and noth-

ing would have advanced beyond the first known treasure, *Venus of Willendorf* (20,000–10,000 B.C.). Nam June Paik created a new work of art in a new art form—a live seminude female playing the cello. On the other hand, if precedent, in art as in law, is the criterion of validity and presentability then, since countless artists, poets, and sculptors have portrayed coition, rape, murder, or torture, are they proper subjects for graphic stage portrayal? Further, is one's awareness of a work of art the criterion of acceptability? If one has never heard of Beethoven's "Eroica" symphony, does that make it indecent? In "The Topless Muse—Censorship with Precedent,"³ Judge Yalkut wrote: "A more careful study of history would have acquainted him [Shalleck] with ancient Greek and Roman painting, classic representations of the Orphic myth, and the works of artists like Eustache Le Sueur, Aubrey Beardsley, *Commedia dell'Arte* of Marc Chagall, and the odalisques of Ingres. Le Sueur's canvas of the muses *Melpomène, Erato, and Polymnie* depicts the muse of sacred song as a bare-breasted cellist."⁴ Thus Miss Moorman's role in our cultural life seems well precedented and defined, and most worthy of our audience."

DECISION: "Would the same be true, I ask, if (in the warmer days of the summer, I grant you) the wife of a public figure or even an anonymous member of this community were to go shopping 'toplessly' walking south on Fifth Avenue past St. Thomas and St. Patricks into Saks at Fiftieth Street or on Thirty-fourth Street past Ohrbach's and Macy's on Broadway into Gimbel's, not in a 'bra' and blouse, but in a pair of walking shoes? Or would the community of this area rebel?..."

ANSWER: A lady walking topless down Fifth Avenue has nothing to do with my case. However, be that as it may, the authorities would stop this girl walking seminude, but *surely* the authorities would *never* cover all the nudes in the Metropolitan and all other museums with clothes!

DECISION: "...What is done, worn, and accepted depends in good measure, on the desires, likes, and wants of the community as a whole. It is the general bent of mind which impels the laws by which we are to be governed. If our wishes change, so will the laws..."

ANSWER: The amendment to the statute signed into law by Governor Rockefeller three weeks prior to my conviction is clear enough indication of a change in the wishes of the community. It is the

judge, not I, who dissents from those wishes. Gordon Brown, senior editor of *Arts* magazine wrote: "It is apparent that customs and social usages are changing, even though Judge Shalleck hasn't noticed it. It's really part of a very old battle. Michelangelo got involved in it when the pope ordered him to dress up his nudes."⁵

DECISION: "That small group of rushing, impetuous persons (most of them youthful) wandering fretfully somewhere for some unknown goal of intangible value and for uncertain reason will look askance at these words. It will shout out loudly that I am a 'square' and stagnant in my thinking . . . The noise emanates from a mighty vocal minority whose actual pipsqueak voice receives stentorian publicity because what is angrily said and done makes good copy . . . Can the "Happening" or "Event" be acceptable for its wholesome effect in enhancing the social relationship of people within the community, or must it be shocking and intrusive upon that relationship in order to be of validity to progenitors of it, whose desire it is to force it upon everyone?"

(. . .)

Clothes have a dual function: protective and attractive. The first is obvious; the second is to enhance the beauty of the feminine body. Clothes should not detract. Yet you have a Rudi Gernreich and an Yves St. Laurent (whose proclivities, it is rumored, would not receive the approbation of all men) who mock women by their design of garment which make women look like they are not women . . . I believe that the public will soon tire of Mary Quant and her 'mod' kind of caparison. For the female figure is too beautiful to be made fun of for economic reasons alone by taking advantage of the young's unsuredness in life . . ."

ANSWER: These words constitute the judge's resignation from the second half of the twentieth century and display a contempt for artistically creative people which long antedates my trial.

In five paragraphs, Judge Shalleck questions the social value, meaning, and acceptance of happenings, events, etc. My expert witnesses admirably defined the meaning, value, and importance of these new art forms to our progressing society. Needless to say, our expression through our work is greatly influenced by the magnificent yet paradoxical age we were born into. As strongly as the great beauty of nature affects us, so does the assassination of President Kennedy. We cannot be calloused to our surroundings.

In the words of Marshall McLuhan: "We look at the present through a rearview mirror. We march backward into the future. Suburbia lives imaginatively in Bonanza-Land. . . . Innumerable confusions and *feelings* of despair invariably emerge in periods of great technological and cultural transitions. Our 'Age of Anxiety' is, in great part, the result of trying to do today's job with yesterday's tools—with yesterday's concepts."⁶

DECISION: "She is now a freelance artist who has been on the unemployment payroll since November 1966. . . ."

ANSWER: Since Paik and I returned from Europe in October 1966, I have performed with the American Symphony Orchestra, the Boccherini Players, on three Merv Griffin television shows, on the Sunday *Tonight* Show—NBC-TV, on the Al Capp TV show, on the NBC-TV documentary on Marshall McLuhan, on the Virgil Thomson Birthday Party on NET-TV, and mixed-media performances at Queens College, Philadelphia College of Art, and the Jewish Museum of Art. In its opinion, the court stated only that I am enrolled on the Unemployment payroll.

DECISION: "The Columbia Broadcasting Company took motion pictures of some of the second 'piece,' which, on consent of the People, were exhibited . . . the close-ups of the motion pictures (defendant's exhibit) clearly show the fully uncovered breasts of defendant in various poses and involved in the momentary activities of this cellist. . . ."

ANSWER: My lawyer subpoenaed the silent sixty-second film of the second piece from CBS-TV because it showed that I made no suggestive facial expressions or any suggestive bodily movements. However, since the police stopped me in the middle of the *Opera*, not allowing me to finish, no one saw the complete work. How then can a work of art be fairly judged on such a small segment?

DECISION: "I doubt if Pablo Casals would have become as great if he had performed nude from the waist down. . . ."

ANSWER: My performance on February 9 was *not traditional music* and should not be confused with such; it was *Mixed Media*. Only if Pablo Casals were to give a mixed media performance should he or any other cellist be linked to my case. Furthermore, *Opera Sextronique* cannot be played by a male; only a female cellist who has a complete understanding and feeling for mixed media can perform this work. When I play traditional music, I do

not play topless, as it is not indicated as a part of the work by the composer. Russell Baker wrote about Judge Shalleck's opinions: "For all we know, Casals might have been even greater had he not been forced to keep a layer of wool between his knees and his cello. . . . The briefest summation of the fact suffices to establish guilt. ('You attempted to give a cello concert in public?' 'Yes, your Honor.' 'Are you Pablo Casals?' 'No, your Honor.' 'This court finds you guilty of indecent exposure.') . . ."⁷

DECISION: ". . . It is born not of a desire to express art, but to get the vernacular 'sucker' to come and be aroused. . . . The greater number of this 'select' audience 'by invitation only' was lured to the theater by an announcement sent to them by mail. It consisted of a 13" x 8" paper on which, in the background, was a photograph of defendant scantily clad in a bathing bikini suit holding her cello and bow with her left hand. Superimposed thereon was printing, in part proclaiming the defendant playing on the night of February 9, 1967, of Mr. Paik's *Opera Sextronique* and in less bold type stating that 'after three emancipations in twentieth-century music (serial, indeterministic, actional)' she had 'found that there is still one more chain to lose—that is—Pre-Freudian Hypocrisy.' Then there follows in part: 'Why is sex a predominant theme in art and literature prohibited only in music? . . . The purge of sex under the excuse of being "serious" exactly undermines the so-called "seriousness" of music as a classical art, ranking with literature and painting. Music history needs its D. H. Lawrence, its Sigmund Freud! . . . What was the purpose of the exhibition here? Was playing the cello with this bizarre nudity for self-aggrandizement with consequent later economic benefit for the purpose of enticement in the sense of being obscene? If it were either or combined, then it offends the purpose of this statute. I, in substitution for a jury, have a right to decide as a fact that its purpose was obscene. . . . But if I am to be the mirror of our community feeling here, my conclusion is that. . . the dominant theme of the material presented by the defendant taken is lewd appeals to prurient interests. This 'appeal to prurient interests' refers to qualities of the material itself: the capacity to attract individuals eager for a forbidden look. . . ."

ANSWER: Of my one-hundred-piece avant-garde repertoire, only five of them involve nudity. The nudity in these compositions is born solely out of the desire

to express art. At the performance in which I was arrested, there were no newspaper advertisements or posters in front of the theater to lure the “vernacular sucker” into my concert hall—such as the ones at the ever-popular Times Square girlie movie houses. Nam June Paik and I sent an invitation which consisted of a photograph of me taken during a performance of Paik’s *Pop Sonata* at the New School for Social Research in NYC on January 8, 1965, with a *Manifesto* written by Paik (not me) superimposed over it to approximately two hundred friends. These friends are artists, professors, engineers, critics, photographers, gallery owners, journalists, and doctors, etc., who regularly attend our performances as patrons of the arts—not as “vernacular suckers.” In four days of trial I tried to explain my artistic intentions and goals to a *criminal court*, and leading critics of the art world from some of the nation’s largest publications testified to the artistic and social value of my work clearly stating that it was good art and it was not lewd or indecent and that it did not appeal to prurient interest. What else am I to do? How can I communicate with a criminal court? For my work, the courtroom is the performance auditorium. Time has a way of adjusting matters and placing values where they belong. This is not a matter for the police. I am discouraged that our courts, so admirable in so many ways, should be allowed to assume the responsibility of passing judgment on a seriously presented art form—and worse yet, that in such a role, they prove to be blind as to the nature and intent of what they are judging. This alone would disqualify them from any competency in the function they assumed.

DECISION: “. . . That there were no arrests when Ballets Africaines was presented in 1966 with some bare-breasted female dancers (a native portrayal) or when the Dancers’ Workshop of San Francisco presented some completely nude male and female dancers for part of the performance at Hunter College on April 22, 1967, does not in any way change the character of defendant’s performance here. . . .”

ANSWER: The African Ballet performed at the Barrymore Theater in November through December 1966 to show their artistry, just as our intention was to show our artistry. Would the African Ballet Dancers be allowed to walk down Fifth Avenue topless because this is their traditional costume as they were allowed to perform topless because it was their traditional custom? Or was

Mayor Lindsay’s permission granted on the basis of their artistry? How can New York City condemn in my work what it condones and applauds in others?

DECISION: “. . . A judge is of little worth if he cannot be objective enough to decide impartially. But in doing so, his life experience cannot be shunted aside, nor can reality derived from that life experience. . . . I do not consider fostering the mores of these days. . . the use of censorship must be. . . circumscribed by the wants and needs of the people, not by the singleness of the court’s mind. The judge must project himself into the collective thinking of the community and. . . must decide not what he thinks is good for the community, but what he believes the community wants for its own consumption. . . .”

ANSWER: I would be of little worth if I did not appreciate the wisdom of the elder generation, but in doing so, reality cannot be shunted aside. We are living in a nation where more than one-half of the population is under thirty years of age. We are the scientists, artists, doctors, lawyers, technicians, astronauts, engineers, clergymen, professors, performers, athletes, businessmen, soldiers, and voters. Our century is spaceships, computers, nuclear energy, Telestar, laser beams, mixed media, etc. The laws and the interpretations of the laws should progress with our growth!

* Excerpts from Charlotte Moorman’s notes on her court trial in New York for performing Nam June Paik’s *Opera Sextronique* on February 9, 1967. This unpublished text was kindly put at our disposal by Francesco Conz, Verona.

NOTES

- 1 Nicolas Slonimsky, *Lexicon of Musical Invective*, Seattle, 1965.
- 2 Moorman’s defense attorneys.
- 3 *West Side News*, New York, June 22, 1967.
- 4 Eustache Le Sueur (1617–1655, *Melpomène, Erato, Polymnie*, oil on canvas, 51 $\frac{1}{8}$ " x 54 $\frac{3}{8}$ ", Louvre, Paris. In this painting Erato is shown bare-breasted playing the cello.
- 5 *Arts* magazine, summer 1967.
- 6 Marshall McLuhan, Quentin Fiore, *The Medium Is the Message*, Bantam, New York/London/Toronto, 1967, p. 75.
- 7 *New York Times*, May 14, 1967.



TV Rodin (Le penseur), 1976/1978
(first video multiple)
Bronze, video camera, monitor,
27x19x43"
Froehlich Collection, Stuttgart

A C O N V E R S A T I O N W I T H N A M J U N E P A I K

Wednesday, May 15, 1991, 9:30 P.M.

Paik: It is 1991 and we are in the fourth decade of video—the best decade.

Ross: When I read the things I wrote about video in the seventies and the early eighties.

P: Actually, I found this very good—made sure that.

R: I still wonder about a lot of the idealism of the video writing, not only mine, but of a lot of other people's. Their notions that somehow, some kind of a model was being constructed by artists who decided that the mass media could be transformed into an art medium. And for me to think it filled a need to believe that art could be completely relevant, not only in terms of the content of the art, but the absolute intention of the artist to radically transform culture with every bit of what they did. It seemed to speak to something in me that maybe a lot of other people of my generation were also feeling: a fear that what we would do with our lives would be irrelevant.

P: It's a kind of social engagement, you know?

R: But I wonder when you saw this generation coming, my generation of curators and artists, because you're a generation older.

P: Yes, I was born in 1932, steeped in postwar Marxism.

R: My generation of people working in museums or in art in general and especially those people who've thought about working with video, all had within them some sense or desire for simultaneously engaging the social world as well as finding some transcendent activity that allowed them to escape the social reality that they wanted to change.

P: It features characteristics of the so-called Woodstock Generation, you know. You start getting it in 1971, just two years after Woodstock, understand? At the time, Woodstock was a holy word, you know?

R: You know there was sort of like a radically cultural circus atmosphere in alternative media in America then, right? And video was part of the radically alternative lifestyle movement that Woodstock and smoking dope and rock and roll represented. The idea was transforming television into an aspect of the counterculture that was

very attractive to all of us wannabe hippies who were actually just privileged college students. I think many of us imagined that we could escape the fate that we saw out there for us—going into the workaday world—by becoming media hippies and working to transform the culture. But when *you* saw this generation of media-hip students coming, when you first recognized us, you were coming from a very different background. From a very serious music background, a profoundly serious art world that was completely disengaged from the commercial world. You were truly hermetic. What did you think about this generation of young, idealistic video hippies?

P: You and the Radical Software people—like Ira Schneider, Frank Gillette, Paul Ryan, and early Bill Viola.

R: Did you identify with our direction, or did you think it was somehow just culturally interesting?

P: I was happy to meet this new generation of people. My first friends were Fluxus people, who were always anti-something—antimusic, antiart, and anti-Stockhausen, et cetera. But the new video generation were pro-something—“constructing” a new society with the new tool of video.

R: It must have been very curious to be transformed into this kind of cult figure who was supposed to stand for the radical yet peaceful transformation of popular culture when, in fact, your musical work was very assaultive and violent and—

P: I was embarrassed but happy. Although I was foreign to broadcast TV, I idealized cable TV. I think we all expected too much from cable TV. But I was able to find friends and contribute to the world.

R: But the ideas that this younger generation of artists were engaged in—the search for some transcendent experience, whether it was drugs or the film *2001*, or *you* know, the notion of this kind of expanded cinema, this kind of transformation of what was common and deadening mass media into something that was transcendent—is linked to an early appreciation of your work.

P: Most likely the quick success of my *TV Buddha* was because it was what the young generation was looking

for, a protranscendent aesthetic. When you see the so-called dancing pattern device in my early video circuit (a self-invented electronic device), it was all slowly repeating patterns—all nongravity motion—that is related to smoking dope, you understand? It was soothing and sweet. In a way, TV was a logical progression, because it's sweet due to the repetitive visual thing. TV is the number-one thing for the new generation. For me, it worked out very well because I really never was able to create anything from scratch.

R: It was always found art from found technologies.

P: I work within the given condition of RCA-NTSC TV encoding system. There is not complete freedom. Both technically and financially, I had to work under great restraint. However, *Magnet TV* retained the violent, “antisomething” aesthetics of my Fluxus period action music.

R: What was most violent, I guess, in all of that was the essential notion of the *décollage* and of transforming or reaching with a human hand into a technology that had nothing to do with the hand, that had nothing to do with touch. So there was a certain kind of violence, even though it produced something that was extensively lyrical. There was an intellectual violence generated by the insertion and assertion that the hand had a role in this technology. It was both politically radical and traditionally beautiful. It was the idea of making things that were corny but beautiful, though fundamentally radical, and whose value lay in the basic “radicality” of the statement, not in the actual image. The image was just an image.

P: One guy did it—not Johnny Carson—did it.

R: You represented the artist as an individual working outside of an institutional framework. And even you were unable to stay outside of TV's institutional framework for too long, because TV is such a demanding medium.

P: This is a good time to bring the town of Boston and WGBH public television into the conversation. We both owe them a great deal. Boston is small enough to be free to do experimental work, but large enough so that success there can be heard around the world. The lady who brought me to WGBH is Patricia Marx. In 1969, she was a beautiful young heiress of Marx Toy Company and a Harvard graduate. She coproduced the *Medium Is Medium* for WGBH. Soon after, she married Daniel Ellsberg of “Pentagon Papers,” and shook America. I am very proud of this association.

R: When you think of what WGBH did for all of us, it gave us the idea that somehow there was somebody in that world who was willing to listen to new voices.

P: At the time, Henry Becton [president, WGBH-TV, Boston], was the young producer-trainee who was sharing a work space with me and Fred Barzyk. When you got the ICA Boston job, I asked Henry whether you, an

undaunted and tough guy, would survive the Boston Brahmins' gentle society. Henry Becton said you would do well because this sleepy town needs your kind of character. Henry was right. Henry Becton also produced the now-famous live videotape of John Cage at WGBH.

R: One of the things that I thought about early on was the problem of how video work would find a place in the art museum, or if it belonged in the art museum at all. For a long time I thought that the video artist would destroy the museum as a site and would destroy the idea of broadcast television. I thought the artist would do outrageous and unique things within that structure, but not within the museum. But I find that I was very wrong.

P: Luckily, you were wrong. So that now you lead one of the most luminous museums in the world.

R: But I found I was wrong, because the technology evolved and artists were able to create video sculpture and installations—unleashing a power of the video image.

P: Peter Campus used the phrase “video installation” instead of “video sculpture” because it seemed a fitting expression to describe the room-filled environs that he created. I myself tried not to be associated with such a classical term as “video sculpture.” But in 1977, René Block coined “video sculpture” for Shigeo Kubota. It was becoming to her work, which is very self-contained like classical sculpture, and the word *installation* is not very chic in German, because it is used to mean toilet installation. We were also at the end of socialistic idealism. For better or worse, we were resigned to live with retrocapitalism for the next fifty to one hundred years. As an Asian, I give credit to Western civilization, which has the dialectic power to regenerate itself constantly, whereas Asia's history is yoked with stagnation. Despite economic and technological advances, Asian psychology has not changed too much, and this causes tension in Asian society.

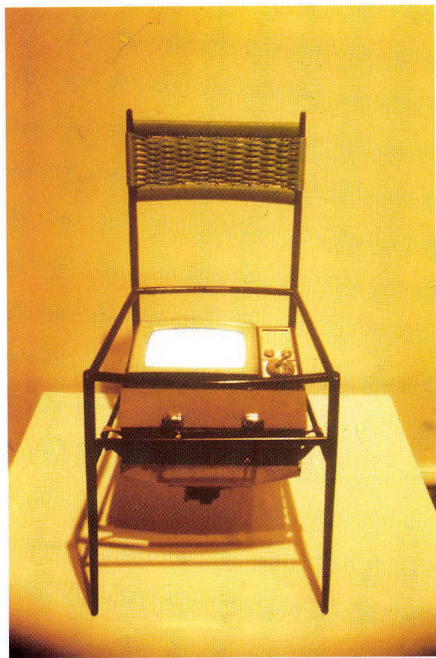
R: Do you believe that the notion of a dialectic growth is inherently Western?

P: The dialectic of self-innovation is the Western heritage. The Western heritage is the incarnation of the myth of Prometheus, who steals fire from the gods. China and Asians, who live the Confucian edict of complete obedience to one's elders, have little space for individual freedom. Vertical obeisance only—China has fifty thousand nouns, and not one of them means *freedom*. At the end of the nineteenth century, Japanese scholars had to translate many European concepts and nouns into Japanese ones. It was very easy to translate the concept of *duty*, obligation. But they had a hard time trying to find a Japanese word for *right*—individual right, the right to do something or to own something.

R: The basic concept of open/closed circuits. Western cultures are open-circuit cultures, and the Eastern cultures are closed-circuit cultures.

P: Mr. Junji Ito—a very good and respected art critic in Japan, despite living for so long in France—agreed with me, that maybe Asia will become strong and a world leader. But it may not be a good thing for the history of the world. Of course, I am saying this as a devil’s advocate, and Ito and I will be beaten for expressing such unpatriotic sentiments in Asia.

R: But how can you do anything about that?



TV Chair, 1968–1974
Chair, television, camera
Property of the artist (Photo, Peter Moore)

Asians. It was partially just radical chic, partially the high level of exploitation, which was severe in Korea. White Terrorism was so rampant that we refused to see Red Terrorism happening in North Korea, although we all knew about it. My leftist tendencies were fortified by the plight of my aunt’s family. My maternal uncle, Mr. Ko, was an important publisher when he was young, but he was a playboy and a revolutionary. He lost all his money



TV Chair, 1968–1974
Chair, television, camera
Statens Konstmuseer Stockholm (Photo, Per-Anders Allstein)

P: Asia would have to get rid of its vertical integration and “unfree” life-style. It would not be easy. Despite being an esteemed intellectual, Mr. Junji Ito is alienated in Japan, driving a seventy-thousand-dollar BMW, and I am alienated because I criticize the fundamental ideology of Asian society.

R: But you’ve been working in the West since 1956, for thirty-five years—twenty-five of them in the American milieu. Were you always alienated, or did you become alienated when your family was wrenched out of its comfort and wealth and forced to become a middle-class family in Japan?

P: I went to Germany when I was twenty-four years old, and now I’m fifty-nine. I have lived more in the Western world than in Asia—I am an alien still. I was born alienated, and in 1945, I became a Marxist—a thirteen-year-old Communist. Koreans are not as docile as other

in Shanghai and by supporting the Korean Independence Movement. My father had to take care of the seven members in their family, and my aunt worked as a kind of head maid in our home. My father treated them all so badly that my Oedipus complex started there, as well as my sympathy for the underdog—I always had my big lunch of beef—boiled, barbedued, all different ways—and they could only afford to eat rice. It all made me a revolutionary by 1945.

R: What attracted you to America?

P: At the time, it was popular for every young, rich Korean to go somewhere in the Western world. I chose Germany first, instead of the United States, because it was said there was no modern art in America in the fifties. I came to the U.S. *only* because of John Cage, whom I met in 1958 in Darmstadt, Germany.

R: I find it very ironic that Cage, who sort of translated

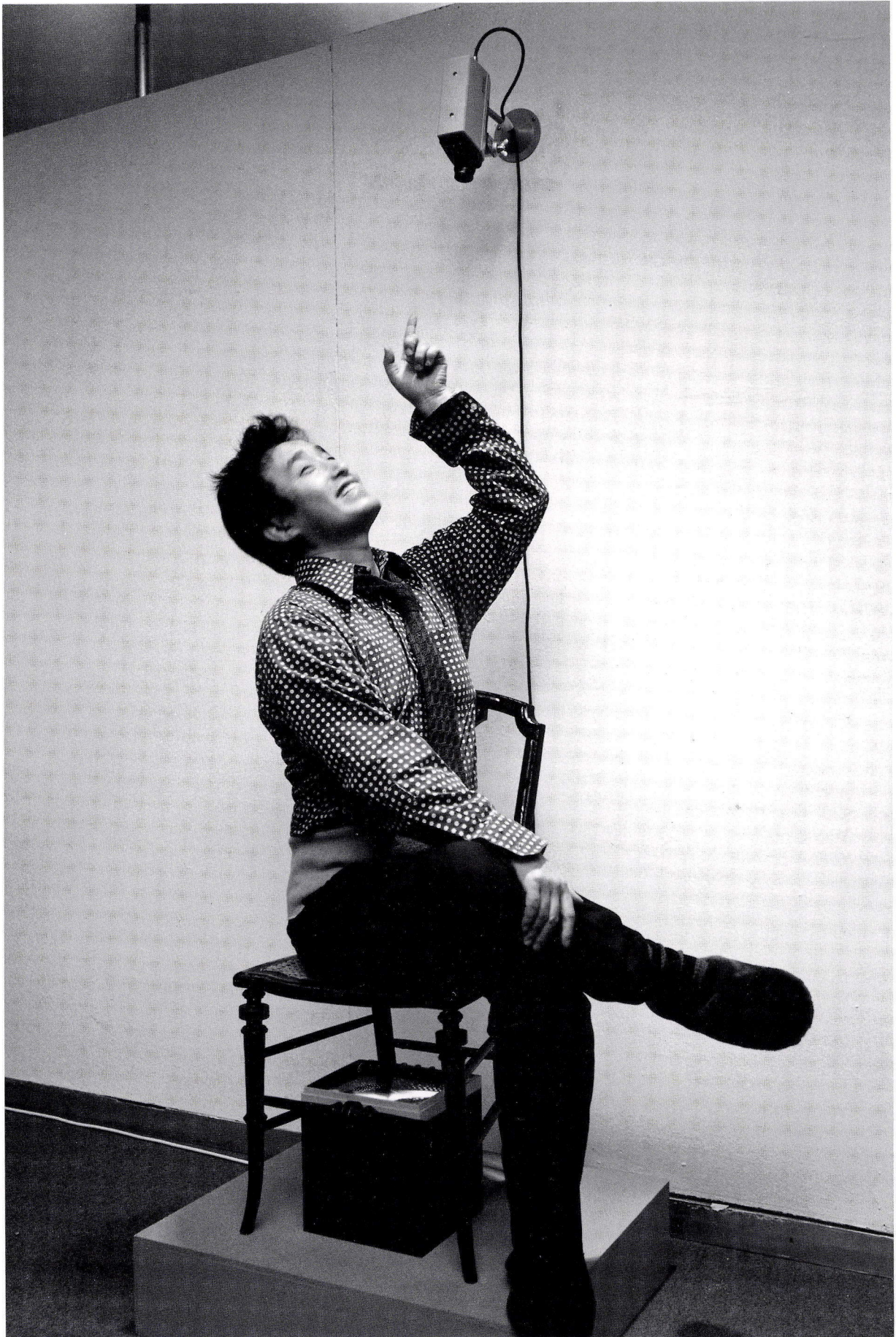


Selfportrait I (Two Hands), 1983
Video sculpture with monitor, video tape,
bronze hand, and hands, 12x13x7"
(Photo, Lothar Schnepf)
Dr. Doris Neuerburg, Cologne



Paik with *TV Buddha*, Amsterdam,
1978 (Photo, René Block)

Paik on his *TV Chair* at the Kunstverein,
Cologne, 1976 (Photo, Friedrich Rosenstiel)



the Zen thought of Suzuki to the West through his music and his writing, would be the force that would attract you, who left Eastern thought to study Western thought in Germany, to come to America. The irony of that is so profound.

P: Germany, in 1958, was a superficially serious culture of postwar, middle-class art and music. It was quite stifling. Suddenly, here were John Cage and David Tudor's lightweight lyricism, which was really fresh. I still remember as if it were yesterday when David Tudor started an alarm clock during a piano performance—it was like a fresh breeze.

R: But did you immediately recognize the Eastern roots of their work?

P: That's very American.

R: What do you mean? That things that are very American can be very Asian?

P: This is John Cage's definition of America: When you go to Asia from America, you go with the wind, and when you go to Europe from America, you go against the wind. Both winds meet in America and rise to heaven. There is a kind of weightlessness inherent in the American process. A good example is Andy Warhol's great invention of nongravity art.

R: The Mylar/helium pillows.

P: This goes well with the concept of transcendency you mentioned before.

R: Andy Warhol's plastic helium balloons were supposed to represent transcendence, yet mocked transcendence while representing it. Pop, like Fluxus, mocked the ideas that art could be transcendent and that the artist had anything at all to do with providing people with a transcendent path. If there was any spirituality in it at all, then Pop Art and Fluxus were sort of like Mahayana Buddhism, where the only way that you can become enlightened is if you're enlightened yourself. No individual has the responsibility or capability to enlighten another, just to recognize his or her own enlightenment. There's a Calvinist thread that runs through a lot of American philosophy that is very individualistic and denies responsibility for collective transcendence. It seems that the art of the sixties that was so attractive to counterculture, college students, and young people spoke out of both sides of its mouth: It preached a kind of universal transcendence as a group, but only if every one tried hard and wanted it badly enough. It's like Peter Pan wishing for Tinker Bell to be alive. If everyone just wished for transcendence together, then it would happen for everyone. At the same time, there was this real cynical awareness of our having bombed Cambodia, and we napalmed an entire nation. We were a nation of criminals and we were living a lie.

P: The difference between the old left of the thirties (Stalinism/Trotskyism) and the new left of the sixties

(Allen Ginsberg and Abbie Hoffman) was that the old left "suffered" for the masses and had revolution, while the new left "enjoyed" life and had revolution.

R: Was that influential to your art, or do you think your art just inherited some of the same traits because it was part of that zeitgeist?

P: My early performance pieces in Germany [1959–1962] were Expressionistic—"suffering" art. Then I moved to video, which is too dry and cool by nature to be Expressionistic. However, when I met Charlotte Moorman—a really American girl—I started performance art again, this time using her body as an instrument and not mine. The character of the pieces changed from agony to libido because of Charlotte's body, aesthetics, and character, and the inherent physicalness of video. I had to personally guarantee great success to her without rehearsal because Charlotte hated rehearsals and even changed an entire performance the day before we were to do it. This was good training for me.

R: Charlotte was a perfect foil for your work because she was a pure believer. There was not a cynical moment that she ever experienced in relationship to your work. I don't know if it had something to do with being a Southerner, but it had to do with pure belief. And your work had to do with the suspension of belief. A kind of pure cynicism of the poor son of a rich family who is forced to be poor again in a rich country.

P: But I had room for her, too.

R: How did you meet Charlotte?

P: She claims I called her, but my recollection is that Charlotte called Alison Knowles to ask me to call Charlotte for the performance of *Originale* [Stockhausen]. In any case, I needed a ticket to uptown, and I thought Charlotte would be that ticket, which turned out to be true. We were still of the European underground/French Left Bank mentality, and we tried to "speak" the Canal Street underground in which we believed. I knew my money and time were limited so I had to express my video idea soon, and Fluxus was really an underground.

R: It was an underground because it emerged from a generation of people who, in fact, had worked and lived in a *real* underground. It wasn't an imaginary, cultural underground, self-defiant in relation to bourgeois standards. It was an underground that had its roots in an actual antifascist underground.

P: Yes. Jackson MacLow¹ had an anarchistic tie and Mr. X had a Trotskyist tie.

R: In the late fifties and early sixties, were you aware of the Situationist International?

P: Only of Attila Kotanyi, a Hungarian architect, and Jean-Jacques Lebel.

R: Guy Debord and Asger Jorn—the Situationists?²

P: Jean-Jacques Lebel was a Fluxus comrade. But I don't know too much about the Situationists.



Video Buddha, 1989
 Closed-circuit installation with stone Buddha,
 monitor coated with bronze, video camera,
 video player, 33 x 27 x 78"
 (Photo, Jonathan Huffmann)
 Froehlich Collection, Stuttgart



TV Rodin (Le penseur), 1982
 Bronze sculpture with Watchman mini-TV
 (Photo, Jacques Charlas)
 Black Collection, New York

R: It started as a movement of disaffected cynical partisans. Did you consider yourself disaffected?

P: Yes. We believed in Communism in 1945 to 1949. But when the North Korean Army invaded Seoul in 1950, all illusions were shattered. Yet, between 1950 and 1989, Western intellectuals were so pro-Marxist that I had to hide my strong anti-Communist feelings. I had to play the game of sympathizing with Marxism in the Western avant-garde circle. I have been doubly disaffected, doubly cynical. Two boys from my Communist circle went to North Korea, as did my composition teacher. I have never heard from them.

R: The North Korean system today is the last Communist state of its kind in the world. How do you account for that?

P: Because Korea is a small country. There's no way to resist.

R: So is Albania.

P: Yes, but it's near the Soviet Union. Albania had access to TV from Yugoslavia. North Korea is playing China and the Soviet Union against each other.

R: Isn't North Korea the last country divided ideologically into north/south and communist/capitalist?

P: I guess so.

R: It always seemed to me that the kind of bifurcation in your work, between playfulness and attack and between ideological direction and cynical disaffection, seems to be an analog to the map of Korea and to the fate of the Korean people.

P: Absolutely. In 1949 when Marxism was illegal in Korea, I hid all my Marxist books on the back of the shelves and put American classics in front of the Marxist books. I hoped that invading North Korean soldiers would discover them. But what they did was kill my dog and eat it. North Koreans have a long history of eating dog—Koreans are wild people. From food—have you ever seen so much garlic and red pepper eaten by a people?—and music to grammar and syntax, we are very close to the Ural-Altai Mountain people. In fact, I think Mongols invaded Korea more often than China. There are a lot of Scythian remains found in the southern tip of Korea.

R: Tell me, do you consider yourself an American artist now and if so, what does that mean?

P: I don't see much sense in categorizing artists by national origin. I like European collectors because they buy my messy drawings and collages, whereas Americans tend to buy my "clean" video sculptures. I love the messy "Siberian-Mongolian" element in my veins.

R: I think the notion of collecting works of art, especially large ones, in Japan is antithetical to the Asian idea of how one lives modestly, and that's the prevailing sentiment.

P: Actually, they buy the expensive art, not the larger

works, due to the lack of space.

R: How do you feel about the Japanese industrialist who declared that he's going to have his French Impressionist and Van Gogh paintings burned.

P: He's crazy. I love his fantasy.

R: Do you think he has a right to do that? Isn't it an extension of Rauschenberg erasing a de Kooning?

P: . . . I asked John Cage, who preached "Nothingness" in 1958, "Why don't you destroy all of your works before you die and leave one line to the history of music: 'There once lived a man named John Cage?'" He said, "It would be too dramatic."

R: Jack Lang, on behalf of the French people, considered suing the Industrialist to prevent him from burning those masterworks, because it would be tantamount to a national insult. [. . .] I saw John Cage the other night at Shigeko's opening.³ As we were driving back together he was very nervous, the way he can be because he was late getting to a concert, and we talked about how on the one hand, he's very open-minded about time and those kinds of things, and on the other hand, he's very concerned about being prompt and fulfilling his obligations. We talked about Woody Allen's idea from *American Life* that you can succeed 80 percent of the time just by showing up. You have to add the other 20 percent in accomplishment and effort and, that if you don't create a hierarchy between presence and absence, then you can have a guaranteed 100 percent by not showing up at all. It would seem strange to me for Cage not to have a hierarchy between 100 percent being there and 100 percent not being there because they were both 100 percent, but one of them was easier. I think he liked that idea.

P: He was not late, and I am glad that he made the concert on time. It was consistent with his background. You see, I met many great people who preached "Nothingness" or "Drop out"—the Beatnik philosophy and anarchistic life-style—but these leaders of the seemingly antisocial movement were perfectly serious, meticulous individuals, who must have gotten straight A's in school. John Cage, Allen Ginsberg, Julian Beck, Judith Malina, Joseph Beuys—they were all great revolutionaries and they were all perfect and reliable people who paid back every moral debt and social favor. Their personal behavior was such that they could have succeeded in any other field. This is very far from the outlaw image they projected.

R: Well, I think that's part of what makes Cage so compelling and endearing.

P: Even though he talks about "Nothingness," he wants to excel in everything he does, just like Allen Ginsberg. I remember Julian Beck talking with Allen about his impending death. With great laughter Julian said, "Allen Ginsberg came to my hospital bed and asked me how I

felt about dying within one year. I replied, 'Allen, I can't die in one year, I have too much to do!'" Julian spoke about this episode with such great humor; here were these two guys who had achieved everything a human being could achieve, and they were treating Julian's life like a pancake that's in a midair flip. That's a very high state of Enlightenment.

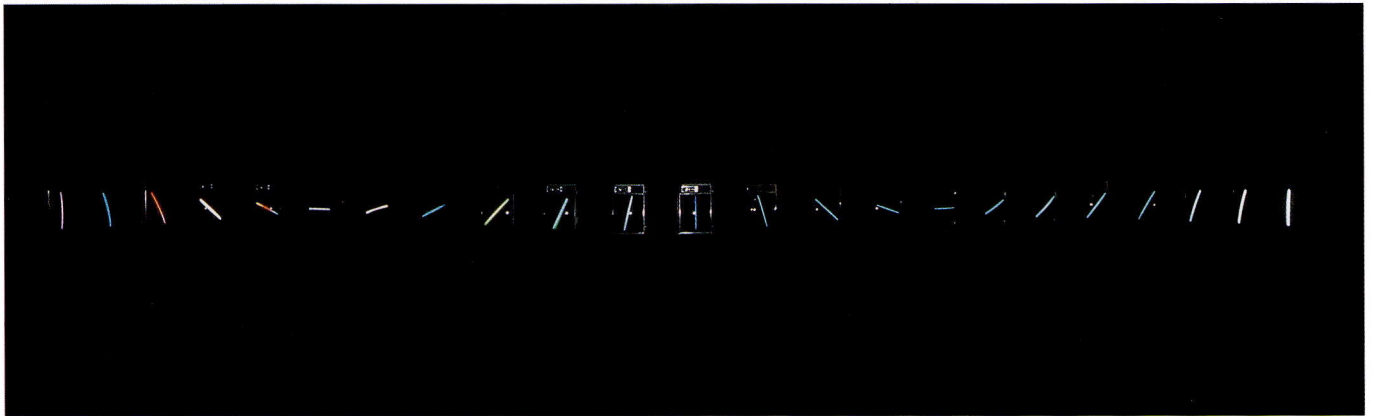
David Ross is Alice Pratt Brown Director of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

NOTES

1 Jackson MacLow (born 1922), American poet, is mentioned often by Cage and Paik. He says he sees himself as "a composer of poems, music, and drama. I do not belong to any 'poetic school,' but my work between 1954 and 1980 has much affinity to that of Cage, Morton Feldman, Earl Brown, La Monte Young, and strong affinities to concrete poetry, especially to Emmett Williams . . ." (*Contemporary Poets*, New York, 1985.)

2 Jorn and Debord were principal founders of the *Internationale Situationniste*, established in 1957 with a magazine of that name that published twelve editions. A pleasure for passionate, impulsive expression and artistic provocation characterized the group.

3 *Shigeko Kubota, Video Sculpture*, American Museum of the Moving Image, Queens, New York, April 26 to September 15, 1991.



TV Clock, 1982
24 televisions
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1982
(Photo, Peter Moore)

H A R D W A R E

While artists have mastered video technology, they've always had to work within the predetermined scope that it offered. Experimental artists like Paik certainly managed to elicit new functions from the technology that had not been anticipated by designers and manufacturers, but the basic structure of their artistic production was determined by the equipment itself. When I was collecting material for my dissertation on Nam June Paik in the early eighties, I was faced with the question of the categories into which his work should be placed, as I had to follow a certain academically imposed format. After a few attempts to structure the material, it seemed ideal to group Paik's works from the standpoint of their technology. Any particular technique included quite different content elements, and division according to subject matter did not seem possible because of the unusual formal language.

In America, the terms *single channel* and *multichannel* are employed. *Single channel* means a videotape, and *multichannel* as a rule indicates a video installation. But as an installation with an operating video camera is based on quite different technical requirements from an installation with a videotape running in it, I have adopted the familiar terms *closed-circuit installation* and *multimonitor installation*. A closed-circuit installation records a subject on a closed loop with a camera, and then shows the running footage on monitors or as a projection. A multimonitor installation shows one or more videotapes. This does not always have to be the case, but it is usual with Paik, and he has worked relatively little with video projectors. The video works with Charlotte Moorman are the principal exceptions to this rule.

Korean Nam June Paik lived in Germany as an avant-garde composer from 1956, and discovered the affinity between television and electronic music in the early sixties.¹ In 1962, he started to try out the skills he had learned in the WDR Studio for Electronic Music in Cologne on secondhand black-and-white televisions. Using circuit diagrams and handbooks, he familiarized himself with the inner life of the sets, intending to interfere with the order he found there. After an inter-

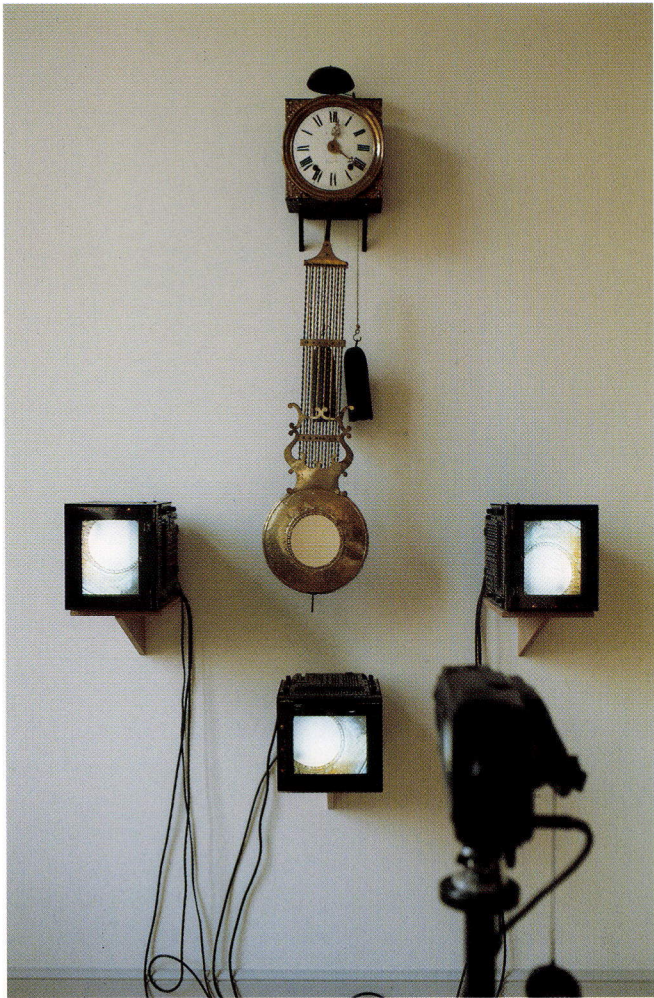
vention by Paik, not much remains of the message but the medium. This electronic tinkering is also a destructive Fluxus gesture. Unlike Wolf Vostell, who brought television into artists' studios and exhibition galleries shortly after Paik, he was not concerned with mere interference, but with altering the function of the set. There was no need to learn from Marshall McLuhan; the significance of television to everyday life was already obvious.² When Paik exhibited the first manipulated sets in 1963, the daily news was flickering over seven million screens in West Germany.³

Although since then the artist has continued to find new ways to apply existing and rapidly developing television techniques, he must still adhere to preconditions in his use of the technology. Nam June Paik has always inclined toward a kind of artistic alternative television that works against Big Brother, and this persists, right down to his robot families of the eighties.⁴ Only here does the television set experience its apotheosis, in a combination of an "ancient" exterior and new inner life.

Paik developed his fundamental equipment experimentally in the sixties, although successive technical developments considerably broadened the presentational range.⁵ In the second half of the sixties, after the introduction of the first portable camera,⁶ Paik laid the foundations for his three-dimensional video oeuvre: individually altered single objects, installations with live camera or microphone, and installations with numerous monitors.

The Closed-Circuit Installations

In the sixties, many artists experimented with viewer involvement in cultural events. The action forms known as Happening and Fluxus entailed spectator participation. During this period, Paik developed a kind of participatory television that made the viewer into a user. Pressing a foot switch or speaking into a microphone produced optical phenomena on the screen in *Participation TV I* (1963–66). In *Participation TV II* (1969),



Swiss Clock TV, 1988
 Antique clock with pendulum, 3 monitors,
 video camera, 98 x 47 x 9"
 Kunstmuseum St. Gallen
 Loan from Schmid Collection

cameras were linked up for the first time, and a sound source made additional changes to the four screens in the installation. Each of the three electron guns of the televisions has a camera of its own as a picture source, which produces three pictorial layers in red, blue, and green.⁷ A popular effect of this period is feedback, which can produce a motif staggered in infinite depth.⁸

In the early seventies, the live camera played an important part in Paik's appearances, usually with cellist Charlotte Moorman, his collaborator and partner of many years. For her he designed, among other things, *TV Cello* (1971), which did not just produce sounds, but also showed live recordings during an event. But Paik brought off his happiest combination of camera and monitor in 1974, with *TV Buddha*. At first he intended to place a Buddha statue in front of a switched-on television as a spectator, then he decided to place a camera behind the monitor, which brought up the front view of the figure

onto the screen. The Buddha, who wishes to keep himself free of all external impressions in mystic contemplation, now sits confronted by his own image, but it is not reversed, as in a mirror image. In *zazen*, concentrated, motionless sitting in front of a wall, the intention is to suppress the ego to enable unity with cosmic energy, but *TV Buddha* represents a superficialization of this principle of self-confrontation. The artist's Buddhist origins show on a number of levels in this work; rooted in the Zen tradition he formulates a visual *koan*. No other work has ripened into an incunabulum like the *TV Buddha*, who is awakened to ever-new incarnations. Here Paik's Eastern and Western sides blend to form a unit in which technical bravura and ironic ambiguity appear to equal extents.

Multimonitor Installations

Whenever possible, Paik uses the latest technology available for his video installations. For example, large-scale installations are usually computer-controlled nowadays. Equally, there is always a recycling principle inherent in his work, which allows almost every motif to recur at some time or other. In the new videotapes we come across long-familiar material that may possibly date from the sixties. But the genesis of all the video work is the black-and-white television set with which Paik started his experiments. Of the twelve exhibits in his first exhibition *Exposition of Music—Electronic Television* (1963), three manipulated televisions survived (in replica) for the next three decades: *Point of Light*, *Zen for TV*, and a predecessor of *Participation TV I* (1966) were repeatedly utilized. The image on the latter of these three can be manipulated by an external sound source.⁹ *Zen for TV* later forms the basic unit for *TV Clock* (1977). Together with *Moon Is the Oldest TV* (1976), *TV Clock* is one of the two anachronistic multimonitor installations of the seventies, as here, rather than showing a videotape or images from a camera connected to them, the sets are manipulated individually. Another common feature of the two works is the "minimal" graphic quality of the pictorial motifs: a glowing line and various phases of the moon. The mimetic structure of the image balances the abstract idea of the time concept. While *TV Clock* in its complete version consists of twelve color and twelve black-and-white televisions symbolizing the hours of a day: *Moon Is the Oldest TV* has twelve black-and-white televisions that stand for the cycle of a year in twelve phases of the moon.

Far-Eastern thought avoids dualism, and Paik, too, sees two different phenomena rather than contrasts in technology and nature. He is concerned that both should blend and harmonize. In the eighties this objective tends



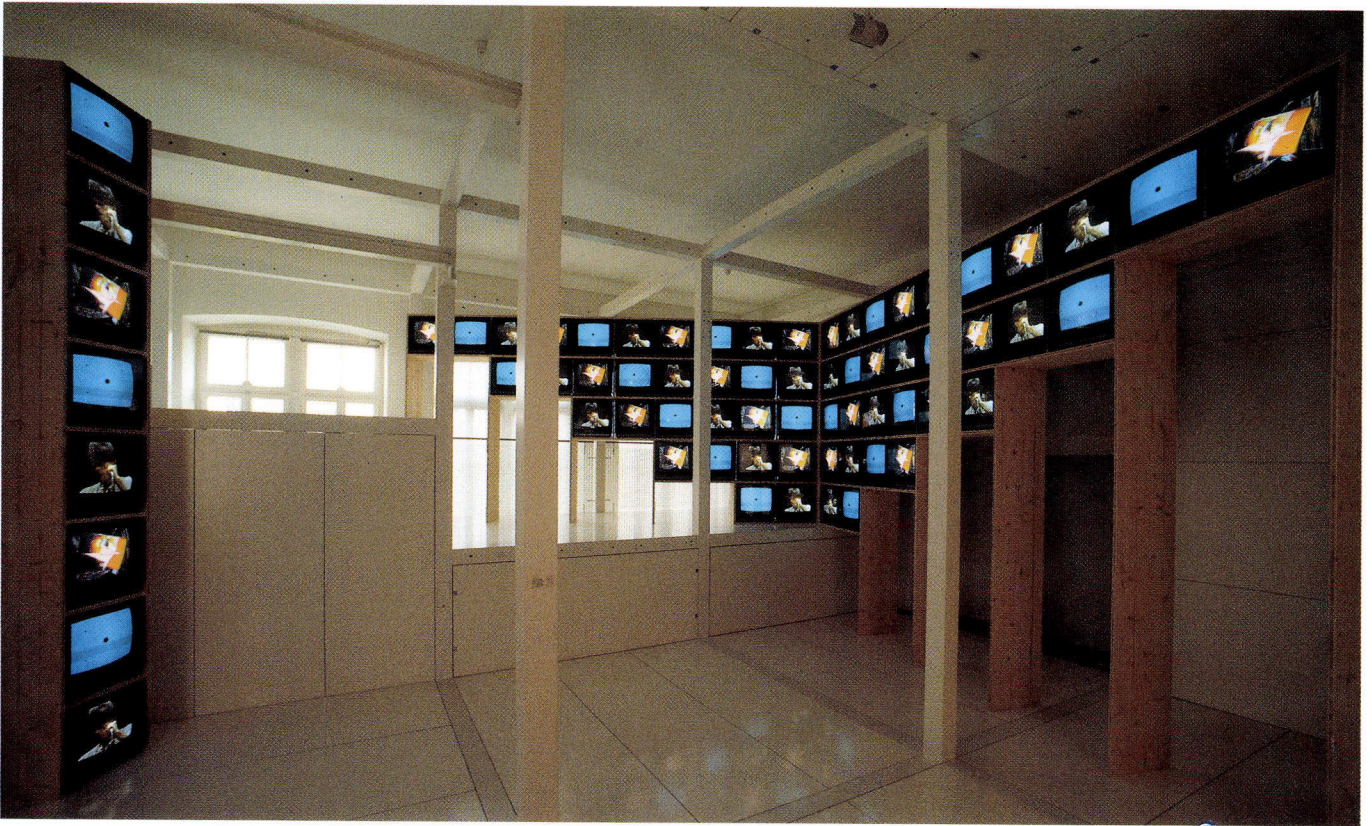
Moon Is the Oldest TV, 1965–1976
 Video installation with 12 black-and-white televisions,
 Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1982
 (Photo, Peter Moore)

to retreat in favor of “baroque” formal development, while the austere and structural concepts of technology/nature subject matter are typical of the seventies.

TV Garden (1974) unmistakably represents nature and technology in this first large installation that uses state-of-the-art equipment. The monitors, lying on their backs and placed among tropical plants, show the videotape *Global Groove* (1973), which with *A Tribute to John Cage* (1973) is one of the first two independent videotapes that Paik intended for distribution. *Global Groove*, which has become a classic among the videotapes, is a collage of very different kinds of material.¹⁰ Early screen experiments mingle with more recent recordings; original quotations from various sources also include Japanese TV spot commercials. In *Global Groove* Paik maps out an artistically shaped world television for the future. The way in which the images are edited reveals extensive use of the Paik/Abe synthesizer. A voice-over by Russel Connor provides an explanatory introduction: “This is a view of a new world, in which it will be possible to switch on any television program on the planet, and in which TV-program guides will be thicker than the Manhattan telephone book.” The message of *TV Garden* refers to a future in which a worldwide communications network

Frog Watching Frog, 1990
 Monitor, carved wood frog,
 videotape by Betsy Connors
 Holly Solomon Gallery, New York





Beuys/Voice—A Whole in the Hat, 1987–1990
 76 monitors, 2 video towers, two-winged video wall,
 3 video channels, 2 sound channels, 3 laser discs
 167x23x19" (each tower), 152x425x19" (wall)
 Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, loan from Schmid Collection

will have come into being, promoting understanding among all nations. This thought has frequently been put forward by Paik.¹¹ Special tape collages were created for each of his subsequent installations, which have much less realistic content, having become increasingly abstract and fast-moving.

While *TV Garden* establishes a type of installation that has continued to the present day, in which only the technology is brought up to date, a new group of works emerged among the multimonitor installations in 1986. With *Family of Robot* Paik developed a principle that he had until then applied only to individual objects: the use of old television and radio cabinets with updated engineering fitted inside. The result is the charm of old objects, which additionally provide documentation of media history, linked to recent videotapes. The first robot family has since grown into a clan, and formal variants have been created that do not evoke any anthropomorphic associations. Paik used to avoid fitting monitors into cabinets, but the robots represent the beginning of a new phase that makes this precisely the working principle for installations.

A new work in this group is *My Faust (Stations)*, 1989–1991.¹² In Paik's case these are not the "Stations of

the Cross" of Christian iconography, but the thirteen channels that can be selected on a New York television set without cable tuner. But the art-historical reference is not so far off the mark, as the twenty-five televisions for each of the thirteen stations are housed in a Gothic-style tabernacle. While the architectural form of the tabernacle and the number of televisions remains the same, the stations are distinguished by various adornments on their wooden frames and thematically differentiated video images. They represent universal concerns such as communication, religion, art, education, medicine, and so on.

For Paik television is the primary information medium today, toward which all other media look. It is appropriate, therefore, to represent our lives' basic structures in a video installation. An ecclesiastical housing for each of the thirteen "stations" serves to place the discourse on a historical plane, and the field of meaning is defined by the painting or the application of the material. A typical feature of the procedure is the artist's universal point of view. He tries to characterize the power structure of global interplay in a critical and revelatory way, crossing all cultural boundaries. Paik also calls *Stations My Faust* to stake his personal claim on this work, which structures

an up-to-date world scenario in an extremely complex way.

Seen formally, the *Stations* belong to the multimonitor installations group. Each station shows three different videos, but here the source is video disc rather than tape. *My Faust* is fundamentally different from the geometrical large-scale installations in the weight of content carried by its external form and the range of its narrative elements.

In 1965, Paik declared that traditional artistic media would be replaced by electronics.¹³ Now it appears that the different tools complement each other very well, and we shall not have to abandon any of them in the near future.

Edith Decker is Curator at the Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn.

NOTES

1 For the history of the development of Paik's video works until 1984, see Edith Decker, *Paik. Video*, Cologne, 1988.

2 Pointed up by artist Richard Hamilton, for instance, in his well-known 1956 collage *Just What Is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?*

3 Hans-Jörg Bessler, *Hörer- und Zuschauerforschung*, Munich, 1980, p. 200 (*Rundfunk in Deutschland*, ed. Hans Bausch, vol. 5). I am grateful to Ernst Jürgens for this reference. The annual production available in the country in 1962 according to the Federal Statistics Office in Wiesbaden inclusive of radio receivers was 1,362,311 sets. The proportion of imports, 7,285 sets, was small.

4 *K-456*, a charming and somewhat rickety robot *enfant terrible* can be consid-

ered the forerunner of the dynasty of robot sculptures introduced in the late eighties only in a superficial manner. In 1964, this remote-controlled construction did not represent the peak of technical achievement, and as a homemade product it had an amazingly disrespectful personal habit at its disposal—excreting a trail of little beans.

5 Videocassettes were put on the market in 1972. See Decker, loc. cit., p. 145.

6 In 1965, Sony launched the half-inch Portapak on the American market. Paik, who was well informed from reading trade magazines, was one of the first purchasers of this portable camera and recorder unit.

7 Strictly speaking, Paik made this experiment for the first time in 1962–64 during his stay in Japan. See Decker, loc. cit., p. 65 and note 182.

8 *Feedback* occurs when the camera lens is pointed at the image of the camera on the television screen.

9 This exhibition in the Galerie Parnass in Wuppertal by architect Rolf Jährling is considered to be the beginning of video art. See Decker, loc. cit., p. 32 ff.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 154.

11 E.g., “Global Groove and Video Common Market” (1970), in *Nam June Paik: Video 'n' Videology 1959–1973*, catalogue for the exhibition at the Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, 1974.

12 *My Faust (Stations)* was completed in 1991 for the touring exhibition that started at the Kunsthau Zurich.

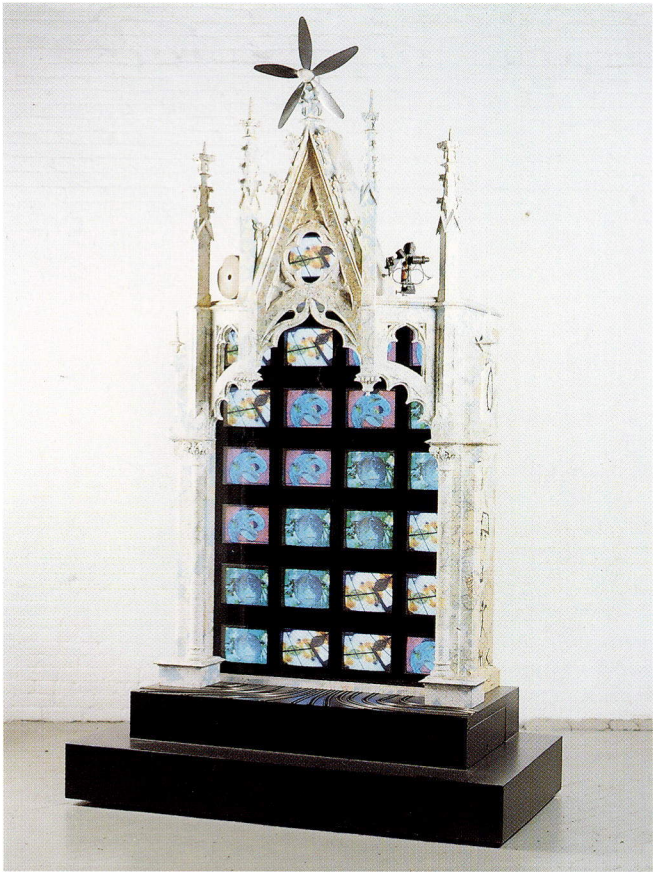
13 In his flyer for the first presentation of videotapes in New York, Paik says: “As collage technic replaced oil paint, the cathode-ray tube will replace the canvas.” Quoted in: *Nam June Paik*, catalogue for the exhibition at the Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne, 1976, p. 118.

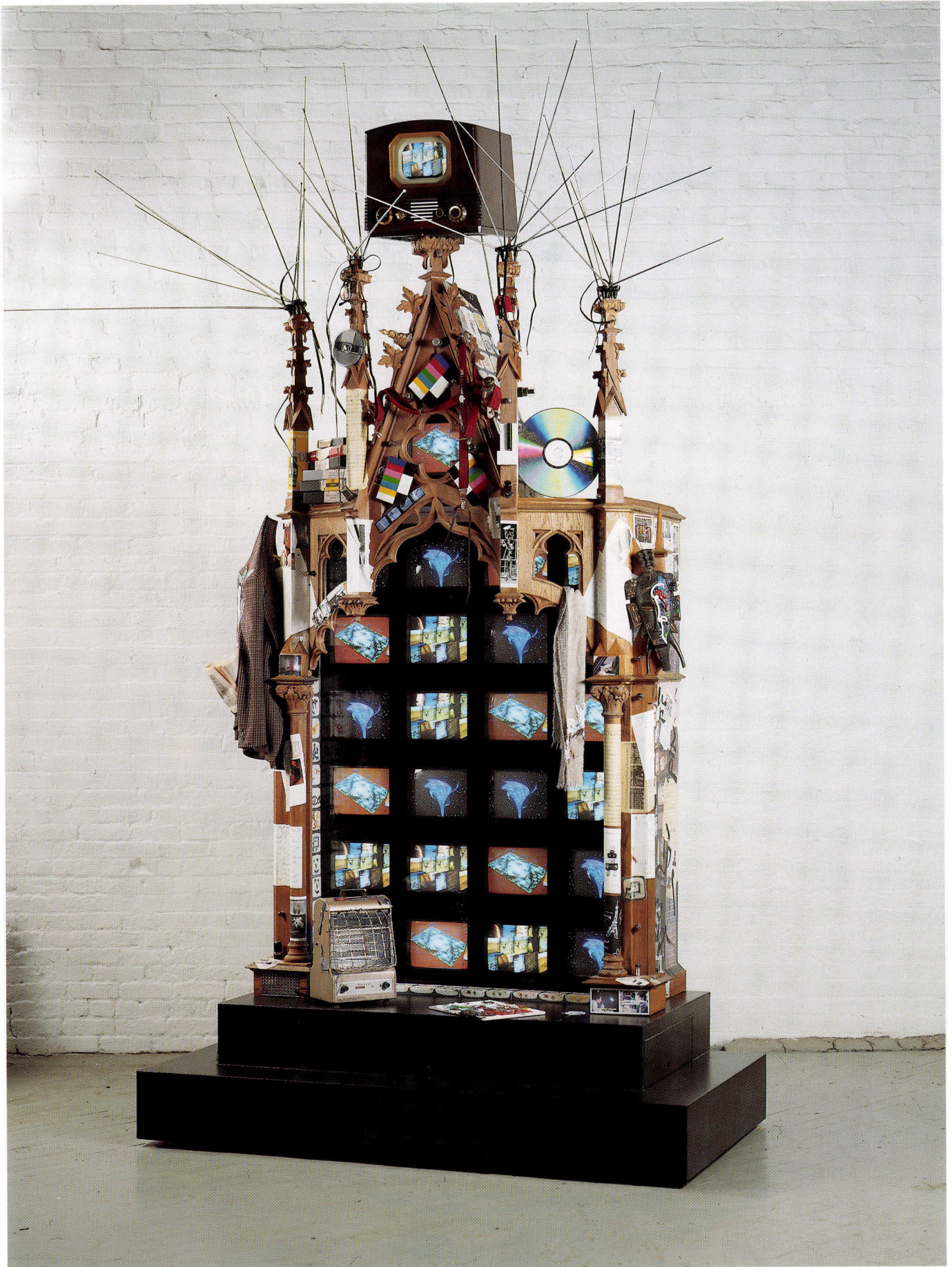
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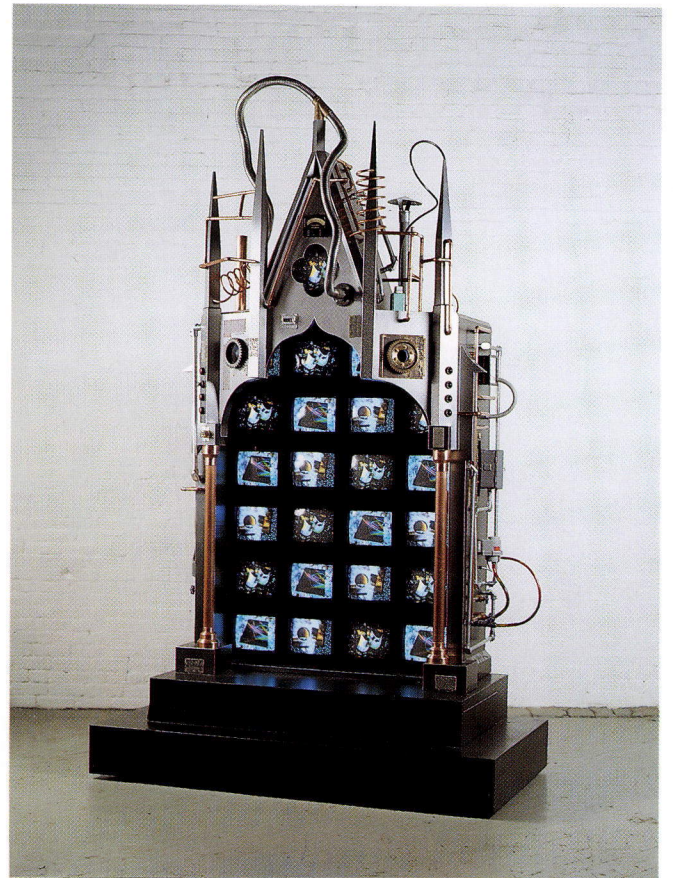
My Faust, 1989–1991

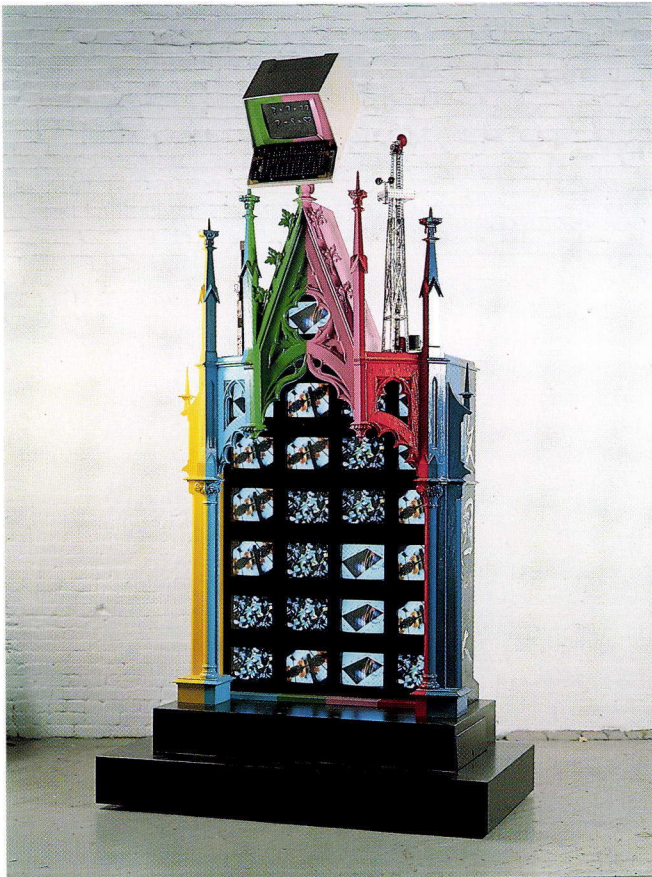
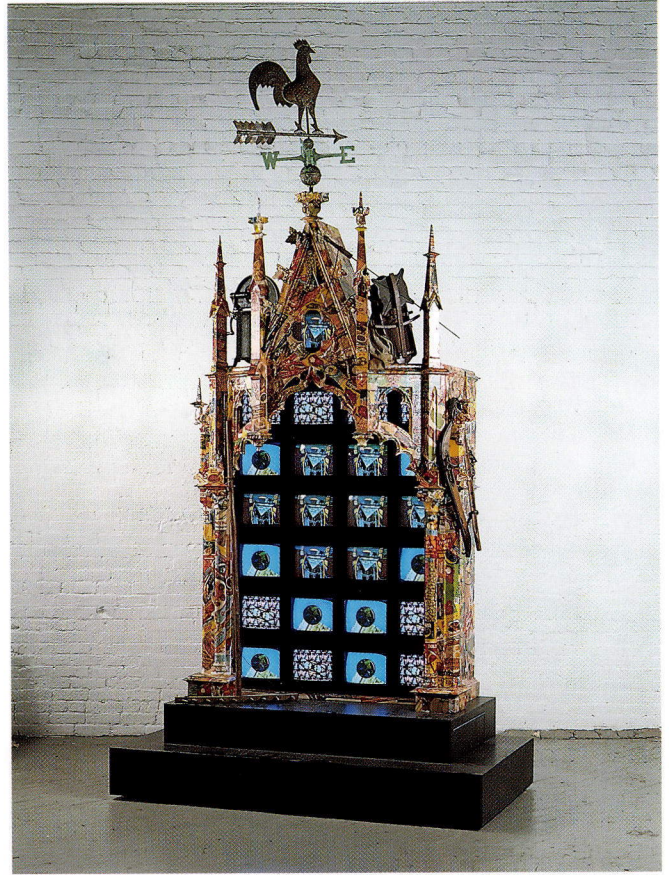
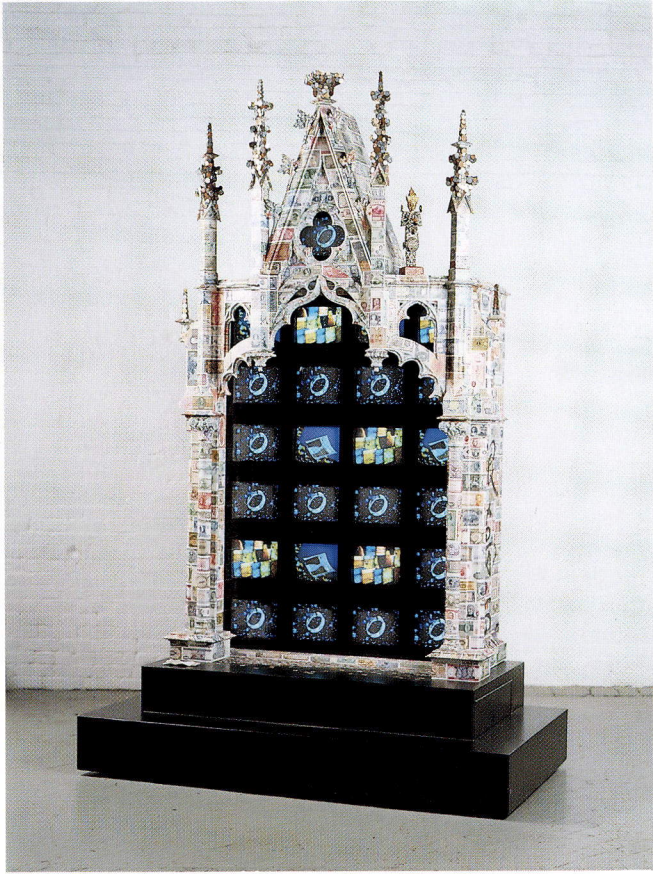
Thirteen Channels:

Education, Agriculture, Communications, Religion, Medicine, Economics, Environment, Research and Development, Transportation, Population, Art, Nationalism, Autobiography
Each: 25 Quasar 10-inch televisions, 3 Sony laser disc players, neogothic wood frames with bases, 104 x 50 x 32”
Pravte collection, Seoul









Sixtina Electronica*

Before I go into the technical details, it is indispensable that I write a few lines about the historical development of information science.

1) Illumination and Information

Until recently, illumination and information were two different things. One needs illumination (sunlight or an electric bulb) to retrieve information. In medieval times, however, illumination and information were often overlapping phenomena. In a church window, information comes through as an illumination. In the medieval codices, pictures were painted in illuminating inks. In the age of video, this overlapping phenomenon has appeared again. Not only film and television, the so-called soft information, even the word processor—the hard information—have all become a kind of illumination.

With this change a shift in the character of information has come about. Human-interest stories have become very emotional (TV news versus newspapers), and often hard information (political analyses or numerical statistics) and soft information (life-style, fashion, personalities) intersect. Greta Garbo is the essence of the thirties as far as information is concerned. The Third World symbol has become Reggae... right or wrong.

2) Time-Based Information and Random-Access Information

Before the onset of agrarian economy, all information had to be nongravitational time-based information—an audiovisual culture with dance, music, folktale, and poetry chanting—because economically, it was impossible to carry around the written records, especially before the invention of the papyrus. With the establishment of the agrarian economy and settlements, permanent records become necessary. Heavy materials like stones and clay plates were used. At the same time, the capacity of memory multiplied and random-access culture was born. This permanent, gravity-oriented culture based on random-access information lasted about three thousand years... from the time of King Hammurabi to the present.

With the onset of the computer, video and storage-age soft information, such as

movies, and hard information, such as bank-transaction records, have merged into the same kind of information storage mode that is the time-based, nongravitational sequential access information structure. In this way our information structure has returned to the pre-Hammurabi decree, yet with a vastly increased information storage capacity (compare the ability of one man's memory with the capacity of one video disc memory capacity).

3) Architecture as Information

The Sistine Chapel was created not only as a mural and ceiling fresco, but also to convey information, and so was the Cathedral of Chartres. Architects designed churches in a manner that during vespers the setting sun would shine through the stained-glass rose window. This triad merging of emotional information, audio-visual information, and time-based, time-coded information has been largely forgotten in today's architecture. The words *prime time* appeared first in the notation of the Gregorian chant as "prime service." Especially ceilings—which were of paramount importance, from San Marco in Venice to Michelangelo's in the Sistine Chapel—are ignored in modern church design.

Sixtina Matrix for the Cité des Sciences et de l'Industrie in Paris

The ceiling is the least utilized space of modern architecture, although it was used as the primary information display from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, and even in Baroque architecture. One can easily verify this by looking up at ceilings in the Sistine Chapel, San Marco, or even the Louvre.

My proposal for the Science Museum, tentatively entitled *Sixtina Matrix*, is the result of my research and metaphysical speculation over the past twenty years. It would synthesize all three axes of historical contemplation which I have put forth above.

1) The matrix will be composed of 100 video monitors (or TV sets). (It can be 81, 64, 49, or 121, 144, or even more according to space and budget.)

2) The matrix will show information fed from three to five videotape recorders which are synchronized by the "Time Base Corrector" and switched by computer. The possibility of configurations is astronomical.

With 3 videotape recorders, 100 TV sets;
or 4 videotape recorders, 100 TV sets;
or 5 videotape recorders, 100 TV sets.

Each videotape recorder consists of thirty minutes of information load. The combination of information through the above-mentioned computerized matrix system will be virtually limitless.

The videotape will consist of the following elements:

Module 1: organic world in microscopic amplification

Module 2: primitive organic world, such as virus and bacteria

Module 3: plant world

Module 4: birds and insects

Module 5: fish and sea animals

Module 6: land animals

Module 7: anthropological survey of human beings

Module 8: premodern Third World

Module 9: industrial-world landscape

Module 10: high-tech, post-industrial landscape

Module 11: the arts

Module 12: military

Module 13: politics

Module 14: life, death, and reincarnation (recycling, preservation of species)

Module 15: computer graphics

Module 16: cosmology (moon, planets)

* Paik wrote this paper as a proposal for the opening of the Science Museum in La Villette, Paris, on March 13, 1986.

Pierre Restany

Two Goddesses Meet*

At the request of the Musée d'Art Moderne, Paik's new robots tune in to the eighteenth century. In the museum's semicircular room that houses the fresco by Raoul Dufy¹ glorifying electricity, Paik positions four figures around a central fifth robot, *Voltaire*, readily identifiable by his armaments—the pen and the sword.

Nearby is *Robespierre*, decked out with a bloodstained crosscut saw, symbolizing the guillotine to which he dispatched so many people before ending up there himself.

Robot *Diderot*, the encyclopedist, has his books.

Nature lover *Rousseau*, in a bacchic pose, is crowned with leaves.

And *Olympe de Gouges*, the ancestor of modern feminists, writer and revolutionary who, according to the Larousse dictionary, was guillotined in 1793 for sending Robespierre an insulting letter, stands holding a bunch of red flowers.

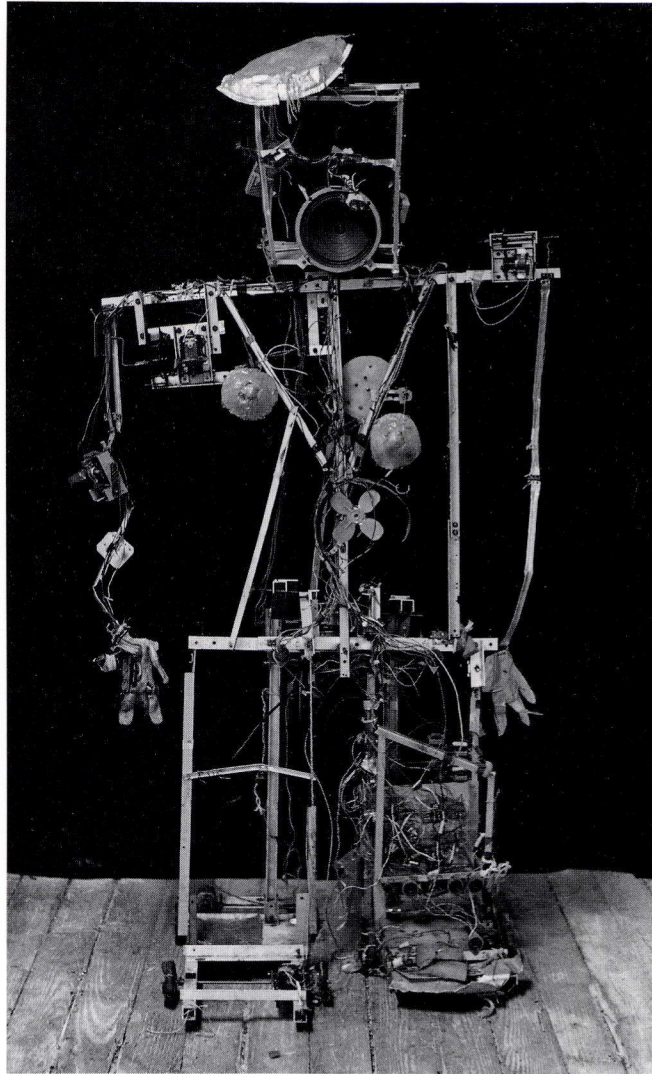
Clearly, Robespierre is the indicted one in this tableau commentary of the French revolutionary period. The sides of the robots' TV sets, their "skin," are adorned with painted Chinese ideograms that address the great philosophical and ideological issues of the day. Two questions are tattooed on *Robespierre*'s shoulders and hips: On the left, "Does the Revolution justify violence?"; on the right, "Does violence turn the Revolution into mass entertainment?" The messages painted on the other robots echo this dual question. Allusions are also made to the universal nature of knowledge; the dialogue between freedom and reason, the essence of enlightened despotism; to the return to Mother Nature between Lao-tsu and Ch'eng-tsu; and finally, a tribute to French womanhood, with its liberating virtues of truth and passion.

Before museum visitors climb the last steps leading to this exhibition gallery, they pass through colonnades and beneath the metal pediment of a Corinthian temple—an approach that conveys the impression that one is about to reach not Olympus, the home of the gods, but rather Areopagus, the supreme tribunal of classical Athens.

* This article appeared in the exhibition catalogue *Nam June Paik: La Fée Electronique*, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1989, pp. 11–13.

NOTE

1 Raoul Dufy painted the fresco *La Fée Electricité* (*fée*: fairy or goddess), dedicated to the glory of electricity, for the Palais de l'Electricité at the Paris Exposition of 1937. Paik's title, *La Fée Electronique*, is an ironic allusion to Dufy's, reflecting the development of technology.



Robot K-456, 1965
(Photo, Peter Moore)

NON - FATAL STRATEGIES

The Art of Nam June Paik in the Age of Postmodernism

1,000,000 white pages follow—imagine.

—Nam June Paik (1962)

We are no longer in the drama of alienation, we are in the ecstasy of communication.

—Jean Baudrillard (1983)

In 1982, on the occasion of Nam June Paik's retrospective exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, there occurred a public performance event which captured the quality of an artist who has come to symbolize the transformation of video into an art form. The event was a public performance featuring Paik's *Robot K-456* (1964), a human-sized, remote-controlled robot fashioned out of bits and pieces of wire and metal. Lacking the metallic skin of science fiction robots, this sticklike creature, equipped with giant motorized feet, a tape recorder which originally played John F. Kennedy's 1961 inaugural address, a digestive track which defecated beans on command, was definitely a handmade object. As it stood on its pedestal in the gallery of the museum, it had the appearance not of a Frankenstein monster waiting to break loose, but of a vulnerable construction made by an artist-scientist working in a studio, not a science lab. In the mid-1960s, the robot performed as a remote-controlled figure in street events and theater works such as Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Originale*. In 1964, when Nam June Paik moved to New York from Japan, he brought the robot, which he had made in Japan in collaboration with the electronics engineer Shuya Abe. Later, *Robot K-456* found its way to Germany, where it became part of a private art collection. By 1982 it had become a historical object, the expression of an extraordinary period in the early 1960s when movements such as Happenings, Fluxus, Minimalism, new dance, avant-garde film, and video emerged which transformed our conceptions of the art object.

The performance staged in front of the Whitney Museum brought *Robot K-456* back to life. The performance began with Paik guiding the robot along the

sidewalk to the intersection of Seventy-fifth Street and Madison Avenue. It then proceeded to cross the avenue, where it was struck by an automobile, an accident staged by Paik with the artist Bill Anastasi behind the wheel. When interviewed by the television news reporters documenting the event, Paik described the accident as the first catastrophe of the twenty-first century, and added that we were practicing how to cope with it. This catastrophe was the sense, created by the impact of new technologies, that things were out of control, that our lives and environment were threatened. Even the artist's technology was threatened, as the robot crossing Madison Avenue learned. *Robot K-456*, which, Paik noted in the television interview, was twenty years old and had not had its bar mitzvah, was returned to the museum, straightened out, and placed once again on its pedestal. This was an instance of Paik's continuing effort to poeticize technology by refashioning it within an ecology of media into humanly scaled and uniquely expressive forms.

In 1963, at the Galerie Parnass in Wuppertal, Germany, Paik had his first one-artist exhibition, which included a room of his prepared televisions. When the televisions were removed from their customary position in the home and scattered around the room, they became objects to be manipulated and transformed by the artist. The consolidation of broadcast television in Europe and the United States had determined the content and form of television technology; television had been defined not as a creative tool for the use of the individual, but as a home entertainment appliance. In Paik's hands, the television became the means to produce a new electronic image, which he did by applying magnets to the surface of the television set and reworking the electronics of its interior. In the spirit of Fluxus, Paik remade the television, exposing its insides, turning it inside out, and disrupting its mechanics in order to create an abstract image. It was this potential for abstraction which the industrial codes of manufacturing sought to cover over or fill in with its traditional formats of television shows and representational, recorded, image-making.



After Paik's move to New York in 1964, he settled down in the alternative arts community and had his first one-artist exhibition at the New School for Social Research in 1965. That exhibition, *NJ Paik: Electronic TV, Color TV Experiments, 3 Robots, 2 Zen Boxes & 1 Zen Can*, featured his prepared television set, the *Magnet TV*. Unlike the Galerie Parnass show, where the prepared televisions were a small part of the exhibition and were completely ignored in reviews, at the New School the video technology held center stage. Laid out on the table, the television set and camera were presented as the instruments of the artist, emblematic of the artistic process. Many of those works encouraged viewer participation: for example, the *Demagnetizer (or Life Ring)* asked the viewer to move an electromagnet placed across the television screen to produce a shifting abstract pattern. The installation gave one the opportunity to experience and manipulate the diverse electronic materials of the artist's creative laboratory.

After the New School exhibition, video and the creative possibilities of television increasingly became the centerpiece and focus of Paik's activities. The story of his career is an extraordinary saga of individual vision and determination, which demonstrates Paik's exemplary ability to work, and share, with an entire community of artists, and explains the central position he now holds in the history of video art. This account of Paik's installations will suggest that the seeds of his transformative aesthetic can be found within the performance-based materials of *Robot K-456* and Paik's first appropriations of the television set and, after 1965, the video camera and video synthesizer. This essay will focus on a few examples of Paik's video installations to illustrate how Paik's

aesthetic strategy used the idea of metaphor to create a vision of late twentieth-century technology as an artist's medium, and produced a series of ideologically positive paradigms for the creation of technologically based art.

A key work in this transformation of video into creative forms is *TV Garden* (1974–1978), a particularly effective metaphor for the electronic image as an expressive organism with its own ecology. This spectacular installation incorporates the visionary videotape/television program *Global Groove* (1973) displayed on monitors scattered about a space filled with plants and trees. This work plays with the notion of the growth of television by constructing a technoecological Eden, a pastoral view of technology, television seen not as a malignant growth but as a poetic flowering. The videotape *Global Groove* celebrates Charlotte Moorman, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Korean folk music, and American rock and roll. The videotape begins with a statement proclaiming a future for television in which *TV Guide* will be as thick as the Manhattan phone book. This idea of a future in which every artist will have access to television is an expansive vision of media that was first given expression in Marshall McLuhan's concept of the Global Village. This utopian vision of the infinite possibilities of television informs and motivates Paik's aesthetic in this and other installations.

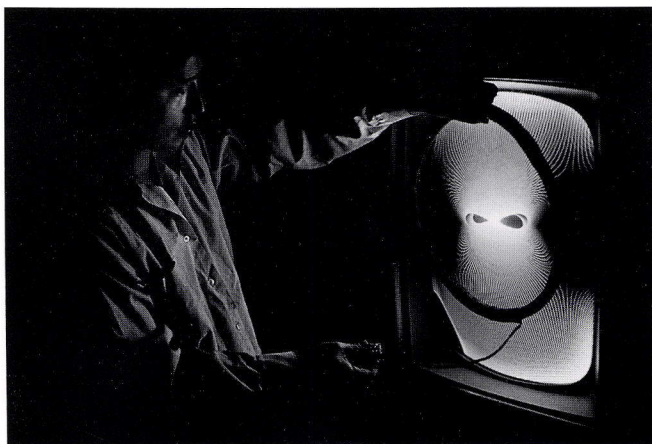
Related to the organic metaphor of the garden is the architectural metaphor of the arch, which Paik began to develop in *Connection* (1986) and *Video Arbor* (1989). Both works further synthesize the video medium into three-dimensional forms, evoking a sense of architectural permanence by making the medium a literal building block for the structures. Paik's initial interior struc-

The First Accident of the Twenty-first Century
Staged collision of *Robot K-456* with a car
in the neighborhood of the Whitney Museum
of American Art, New York, 1982
(Photos, George Hirose)

Participation TV, 1965
Television with magnetic ring
(Photo, Peter Moore)

Electronic TV, 1965
New School for Social Research, New York, 1965
(Photo, Peter Moore)

pp. 82 and 83
Fin de Siècle II, 1989 (three different views)
Video Installation in collaboration with Rebecca Allen, Paul Garrin,
David Bowie, and many other artists
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, during
the exhibition *Image World: Art and Media Culture, 1989*

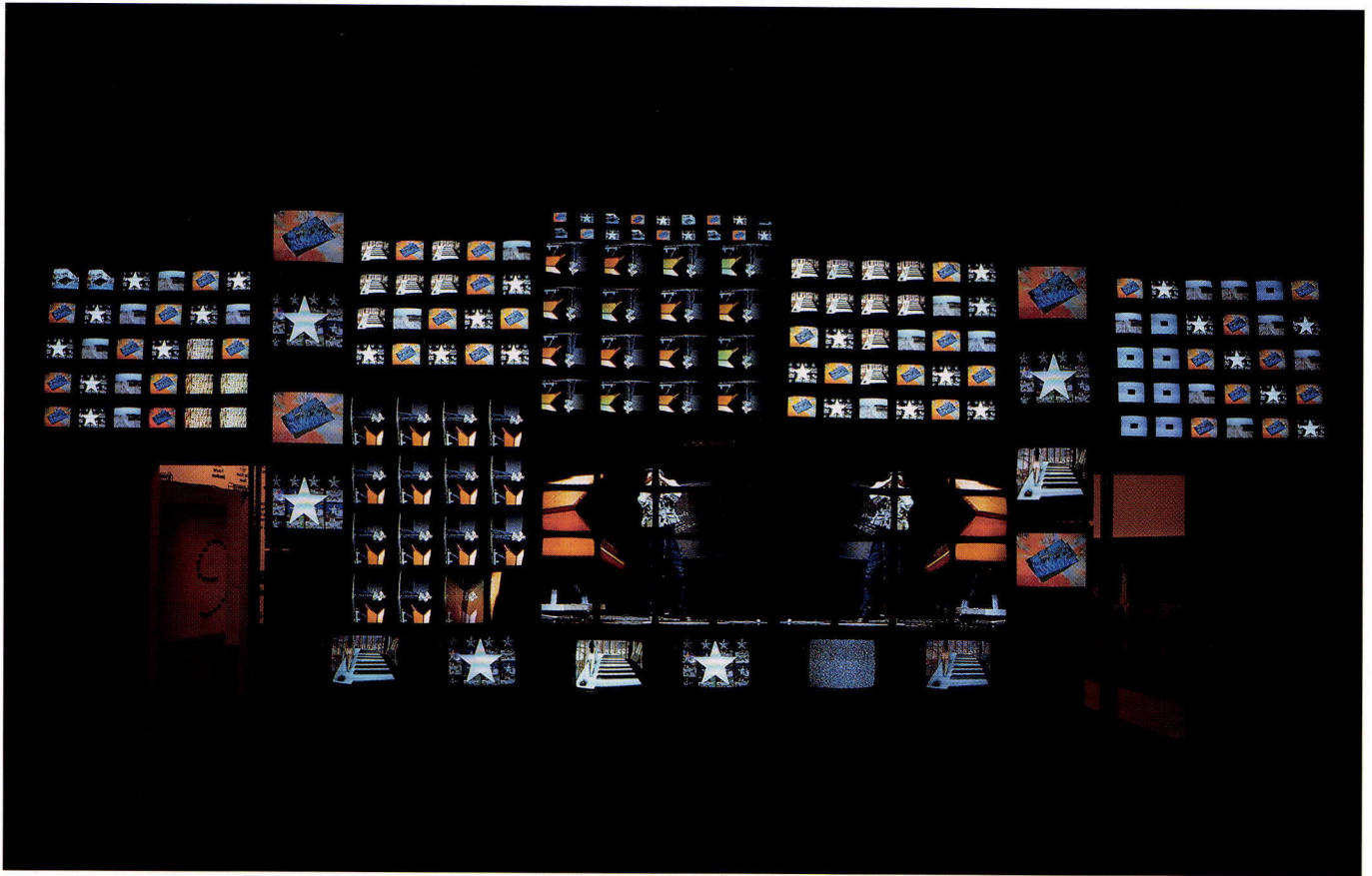


tures, such as *Connection*, are made up entirely of antique television and radio sets. Into each television or radio console is installed a new monitor playing a videotape featuring Paik's computer graphic and image-processed synthesis of different images all cascading and changing at a rapid pace. As these new images play across the old television screens and radio dials, Paik's radical collage technique links the different elements of the structure, creating the sense that television is literally holding this work together. Once again, Paik plays with the idea of television and the video image as tools for building bridges and links between viewers and communities by literally erecting a "connection" that links televisions into a triumphal artist's arch for the viewer to walk under.

In *Video Arbor*, this idea is taken a step further with the placement of an arched installation outdoors. The monitors are secured within the structure so that they can play twenty-four hours a day in all kinds of weather. This is a permanent installation at the entrance to an apartment complex in Philadelphia. The constantly changing video imagery adds another dimension of light, color, and movement to an installation created for a public space. Vines have grown up around the installation, enhancing the idea of nature fused with technology.

The continuously replayed and reused images and sounds of Paik's videotapes (John Cage telling his stories; Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels playing "Devil with a Blue Dress On"; become motifs and themes which Paik continually reappropriates within the body of his work. This evolution of forms also occurs in his installations and sculptures. The *Family of Robot* (1986) begins a series of robot figures fashioned out of televisions, both antiques and new sets, extending the idea of the epochal *Robot K-456*. Here, televisions are stacked up and assembled in the shape of people, in some cases specific historic personalities. While the earlier robot used technology to create a mobile human form, these new robots are, like Paik's architectural installations, animated by the video image. Each robot has its own program of video images produced by Paik. In these robots the television set itself has been further metamorphosed into an extended metaphor for the individual and the family.

In the exhibition *Image World: Art and Media Culture* (1989) organized by the Whitney Museum of American Art, Paik created an installation entitled *Fin de Siècle II*, a title which referred to the work's creation at the end of the second century of new technology. At the close of the nineteenth century, the "first" *fin de siècle*, the new image-making technologies which would revolutionize the arts and culture, photography, and the motion picture, were first being developed. The birth of Modernism which followed the development of photography and film released a radical new capacity to renew and transform

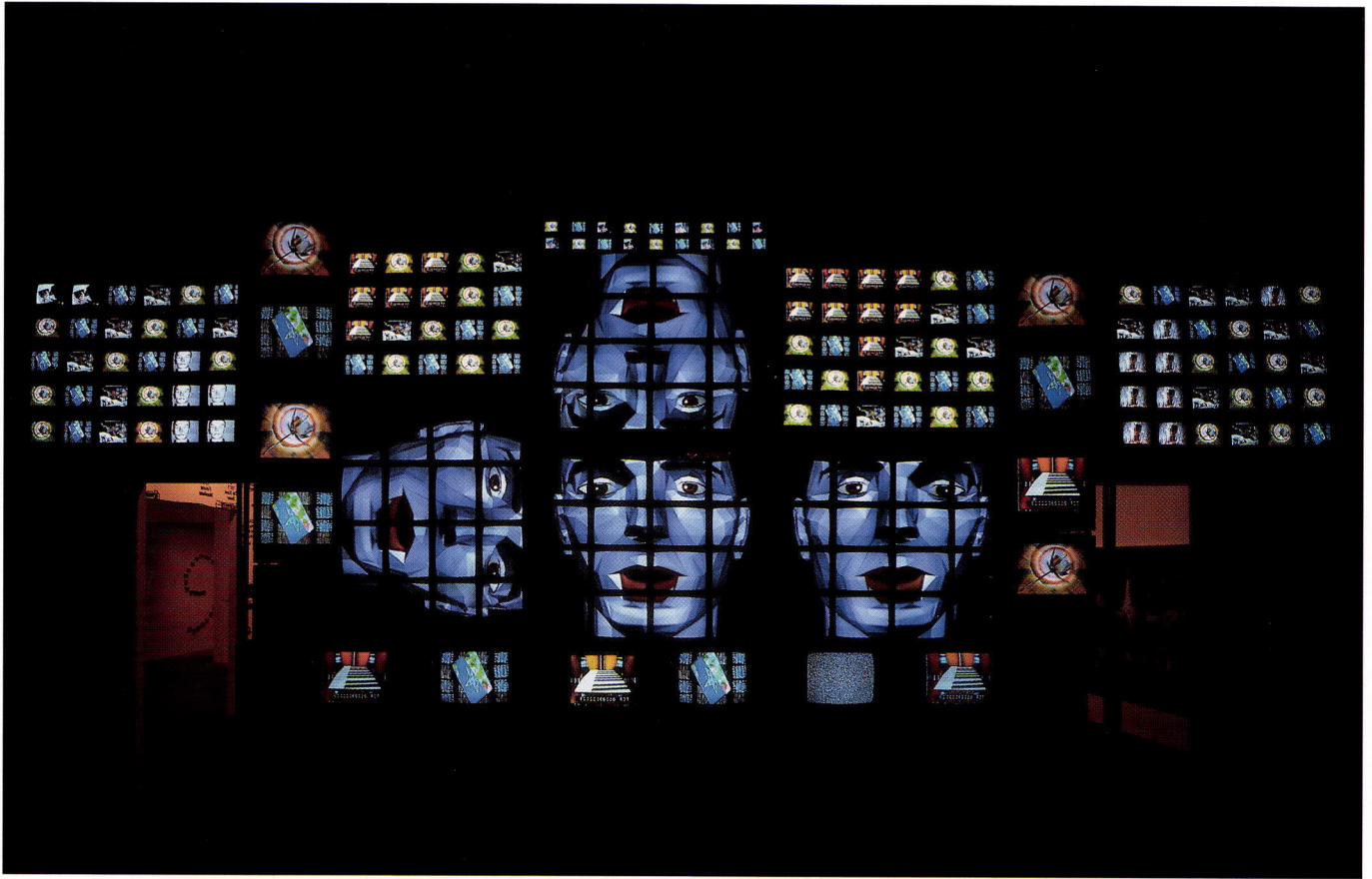


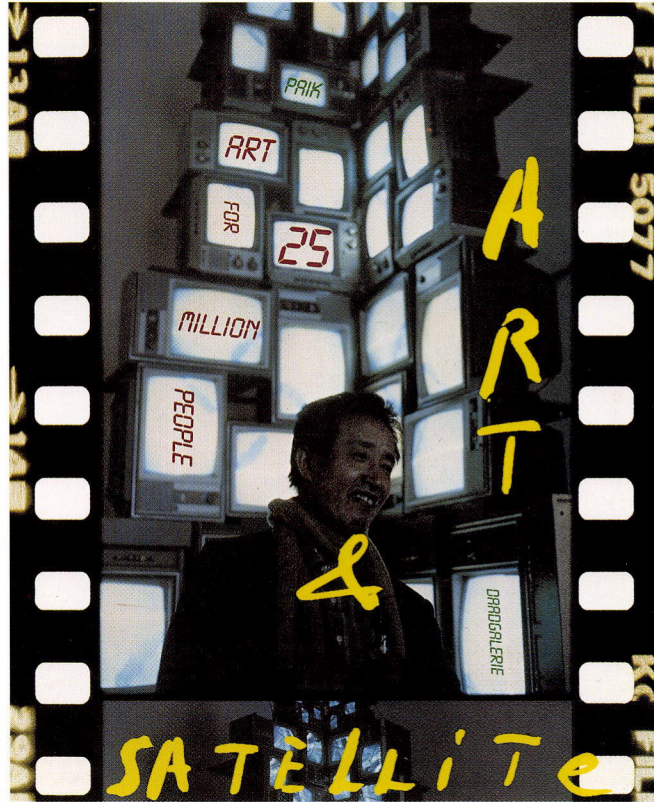
our relationship to the world around us. By the second half of the twentieth century, a new moving image—that of video—had taken hold and would play an equally pivotal role in the historical transition between paradigms known as postmodernism. *Image World* sought to explore the impact of photography, film, and video on American art since 1960. In constructing *Fin de Siècle II* at the entryway to that exhibition, Paik proclaimed the victory of video as a dynamic means to explore and interrelate the perception and representation of reality. Here, the architectural surface of the museum's interior is replaced by a mosaic of over three hundred televisions. A video wall, composed of three video wall units and hundreds of individual televisions, makes the surface an edited collage of moving electronic images. The wall of monitors literally replaces and refigures our perception of the entire space.

Within the cultural debates of postmodernism, Nam June Paik has negotiated an aesthetic that relies on a humanist belief in the playful enlightenment of technology, and expresses the hope that artists, embodying the creative spirit, can use technology as a constructive tool for reshaping our culture. At the center of Paik's art is a sense of infinite play that, by fusing video images into sculptural form, seeks to upset convention by transforming how and what we see. Paik's art recycles his images

and appropriates the world's cultures, not to distance us from the world around us, but in order to reengage us with the communities we inhabit. Nam June Paik's video installations are the expression of the vision of an artist's technology that would remake art and its institutions as a utopian playground of infinite possibilities.

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Nam June Paik: Art and Satellite
Cover for the catalogue at the
DAAD Gallery, Berlin, 1984

ANTI-T H E S I S A N D S A N D W I C H

On Nam June Paik's Work Structure

Portrait of the Artist

On April 12, 1984, Nam June Paik appeared on ARD [German] television's *Bei Bio* program. Of course, fine artists have a modest claim to a place on the talk-show circuit and as interviewees or narrators of documentaries about their own work. But an artist appearing live on a program and having sections built around his work suggests a different kind of approach. This was Wulf Herzogenrath's reason for reflecting on the relationship of broadly appealing light entertainment to high art. In characterizing Paik's work, he comes to this conclusion: "A new type of artist, somewhere in-between high art and light entertainment."¹

If one is looking for a parallel in "high literature" to the introduction of an artist by an emcee in the "light entertainment" section of the program, then it is to be found in the blurb or introductory notes to Paik literature. For example, in *Video Skulptur*, the catalogue edited by Wulf Herzogenrath and Edith Decker: "Nam June Paik is regarded as the father of video art. He is not the only person to have been involved with television in the early sixties, but no one else has made such a contribution to developing this medium into an independent work of art as he has."²

In her seminal treatise *Paik Video*, Edith Decker, further to citing the father role mentioned here, says: "His videotapes and installations, objects, pictures, drawings, and printed graphics, critical and at the same time entertaining, illuminate and question television as an institution and communication as a subject in an exemplary fashion."³

The broadened artistic scope mentioned above—evaluated as "critical" and "entertaining"—is also outlined in the catalogue for the 1981 Fluxus exhibition in Wuppertal, which describes orientation points and working fields as "A mixture of meditative and destructive elements of expression in various media: instrument, theater, technology, civilization, television, video."⁴

As early as 1975, Douglas Davis, himself a communication artist, wrote about Paik in his broad panorama *Art*

and the Future, describing him as an amalgam of artist, technician, and scientist: "In a certain respect these people represent a triumph of the spirit of Dada, constantly hovering over the marriage of art and technology like an old lover who has fallen into disrepute."⁵

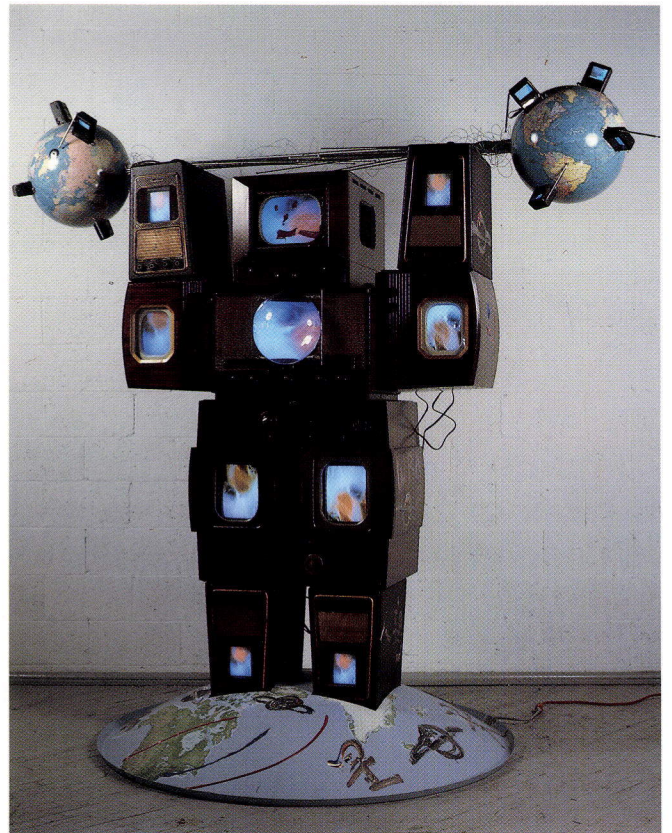
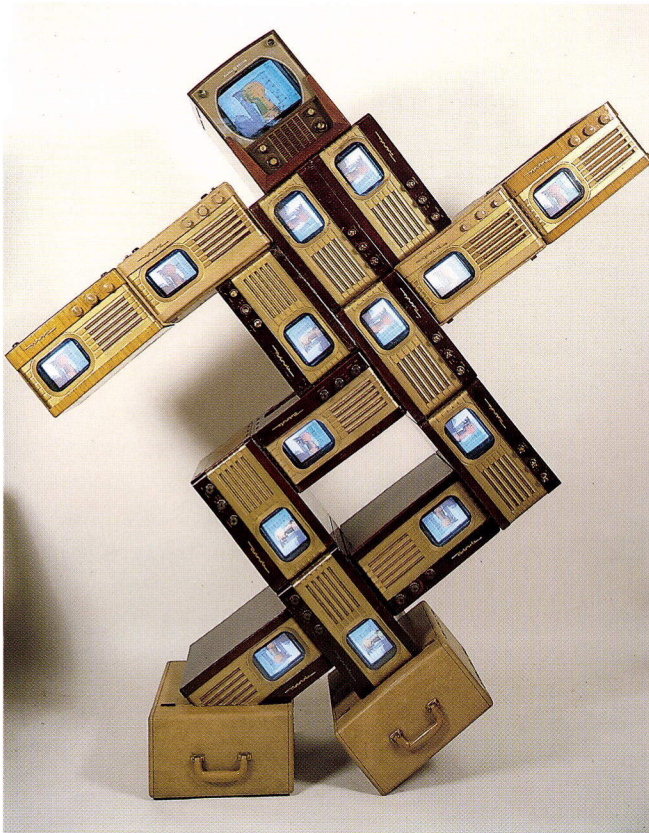
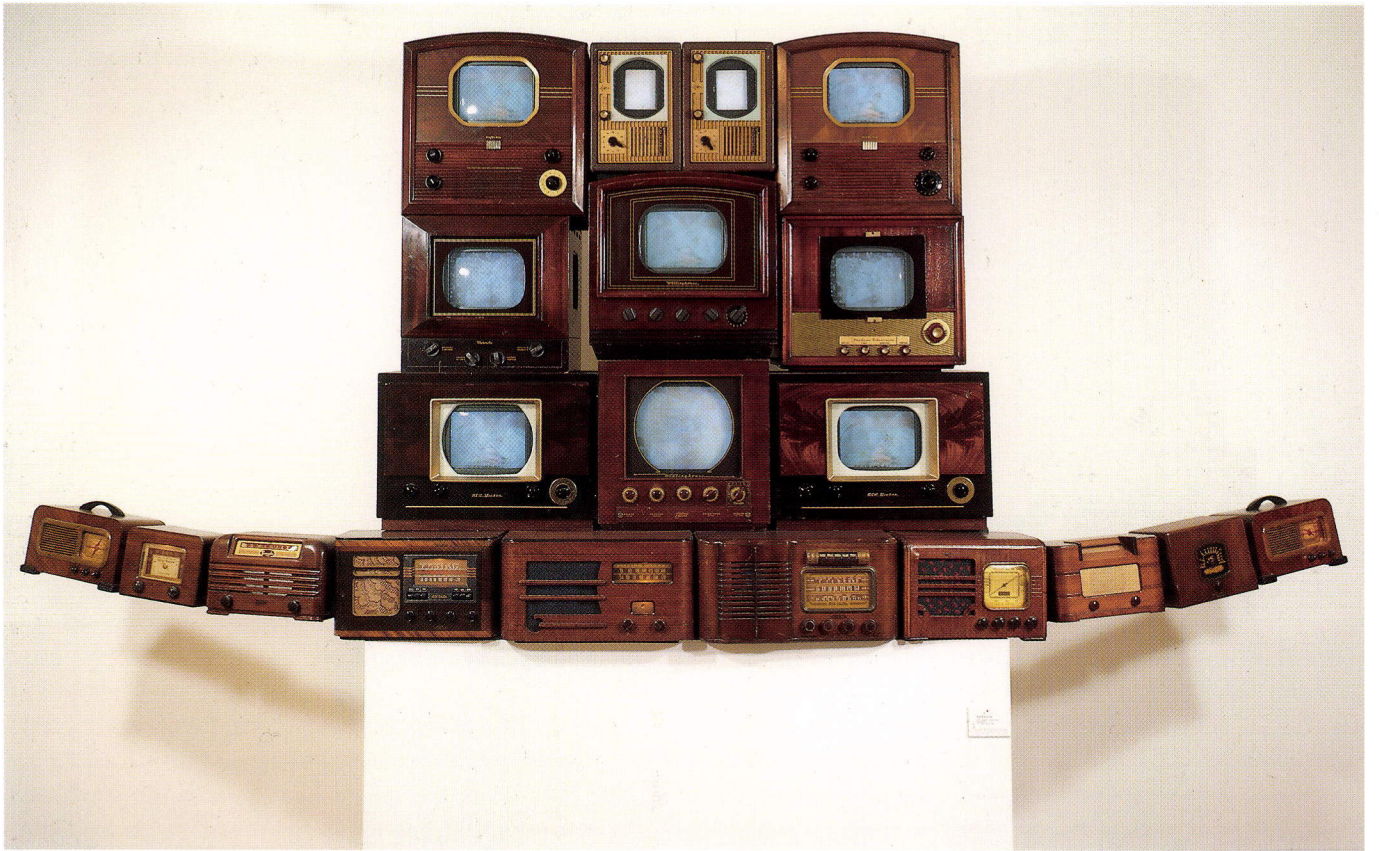
Aiming at conciseness, all of these descriptions use similar terms to label artist and work: "mixture," "cross-over art," "amalgams," and "marriage." But one essential key word is missing in these short biographies, and that is *recycling*, which is another characteristic of Paik's work. Paik is always putting his own video work and other people's television material together. He also adds to and changes the shapes of the TV screens and alters their look to fit particular architectural aspects of the exhibition or performance space.

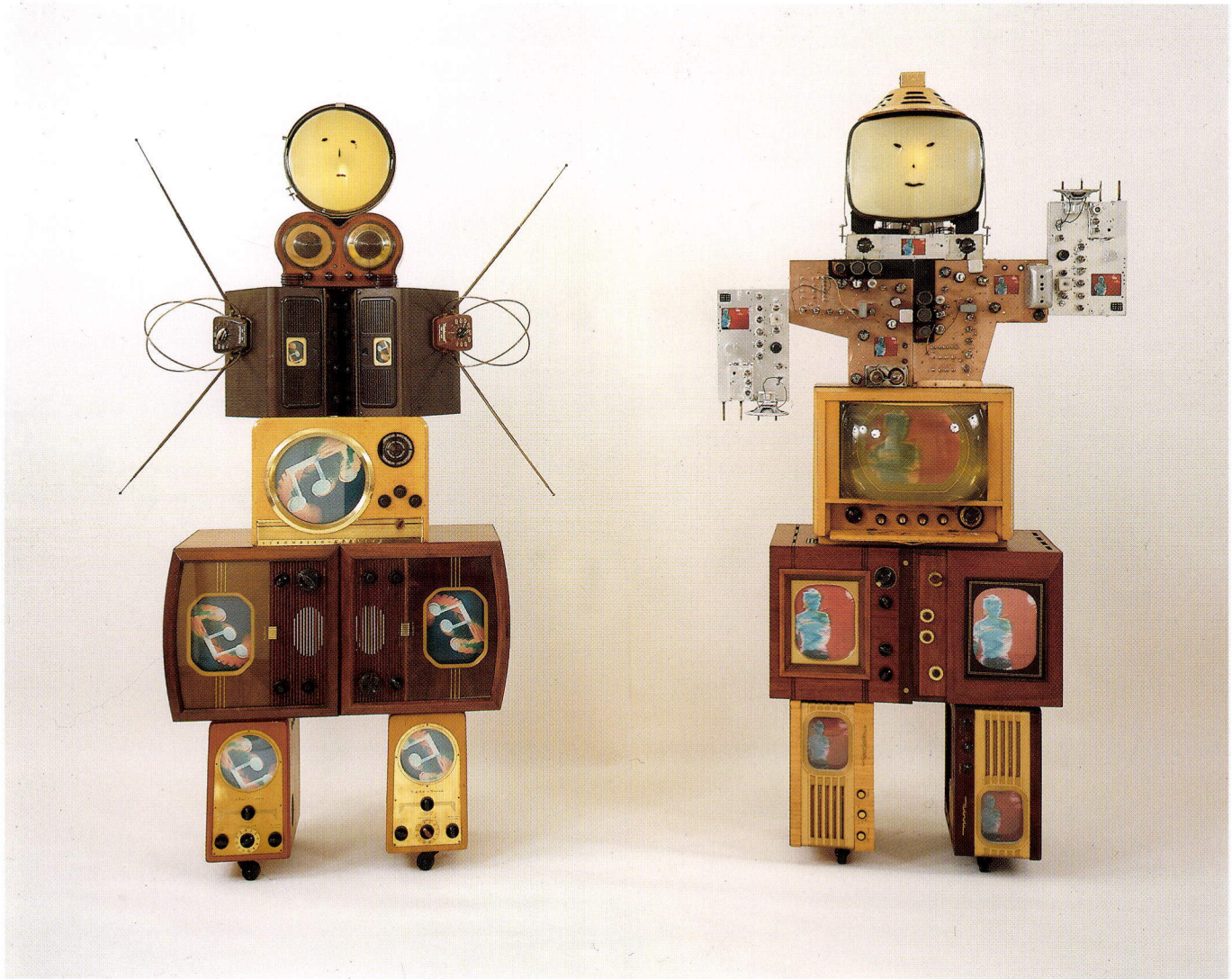
The following treatise is not meant to be a recycling of earlier theses and theories on Paik that have already been published, but aims instead at crystallizing and sorting out the overall themes, to relate them to one another and above all to the finished work, to pinpoint what the above-mentioned "mixture" contains, and what holds it together. But how should we look at Paik's work; what are the appropriate description and evaluation criteria?

Notes on His Own Behalf

Paik, who left Germany for America in 1964, acquired one of the first Sony video cameras marketed in 1965. In the taxi on his way home, he got into a traffic jam caused by Pope Paul VI's visit to New York. Paik captured the spectacle around him with his video camera and showed the tape that same evening at the Café à Go Go. He handed out a leaflet at the café declaring: "As collage technic replaced oil paint, the cathode-ray tube will replace the canvas."⁶

In subsequent years Paik consistently resisted art critics who were less than receptive to the specific qualities of the medium, and he felt his work was therefore not judged objectively. This makes Paik's





Family of Robot, Aunt, 1986
 7 televisions, 1 radio, 1 round picture tube,
 antennae, videotape, 86x52x21"
 Galerie Ronny van de Velde, Antwerp

Family of Robot, Uncle, 1986
 5 televisions, 4 vintage chassis, 5 mini TV screens,
 1 picture tube, videotape, 89x45x24"
 Galerie Ronny van de Velde, Antwerp

Bogie and Beuys Hat, 1989
 10 televisions, 10 radios, laser, 61x347x26"
 Bruckner, Monaco

Merce/Digital, 1988
 15 televisions, 2 cases with handles, 96x72x20"
 Richard and Roselyne Swig, San Francisco

Wrap Around the World Man, 1990
 10 televisions, 2 globes with mini-TVs, dome baset,
 approximate height 86"
 Galerie Eric Franck, Geneva/The Mayor Gallery, London

description of the synthesizer he developed with Shuya Abe all the more fascinating:

“It would enable us to shape the TV screen canvas as precisely as Leonardo as freely as Picasso as colorfully as Renoir as profoundly as Mondrian as violently as Pollack and as lyrically as Jasper Johns.”⁷

It may have been his intention here to relate the pictorial qualities of the new medium in this imaginative way to an art-historical tradition. Also, his analogies are appropriate for countering reservations about “television art.” Paik also goes back to historical parallels to sharpen the distinction between television and video. He says that television, concerned with ever-increasing perfection of faithful reproduction, follows a chain of tradition running from Giotto to Ingres, while the video picture, with its low-fidelity reproduction, has its greatest model in

Monet. These recurrent references to painting in describing the electronic medium are founded not least in Paik's artistic biography. His interest in television pictures was also influenced by the work of painter Karl Otto Götz. Götz translated the experiences and impressions he had acquired at the radar screen during the war into painting around 1960. Besides, Götz stresses that television pictures, particularly with interference, point to "new routes for producing and controlling kinetic forms and structural elements."⁸ Consequently, three steps can be identified: An electronically produced picture is translated into painting by Götz and thus transfers its stimulus quality to Paik's modified television pictures and video picture productions.

While Douglas Davis describes the synthesizer as an "electronic watercolor set," Paik moves outside the usual frame of reference by asking the viewer to consider the picture sequence as "electronic wallpaper," without a beginning or an end, without progress and development. Consequently, he finally achieves differentiation between the video image and painting: "...de Kooning cannot make anything more profound than what he has inside himself. But in engineering, there is always the other, The Other, it is not you."⁹ And he goes on to say about the quality of the synthesizer: "There is no logical and sensible explanation other than its ability to produce pictures that we can neither expect in advance nor completely understand subsequently."¹⁰

While Paik stresses the limitations of the historical framework he mentions for technically produced images, traditional fields of reference very probably come into consideration for the presentation of video works in sculptural and architectural dimensions. In the seventies, many video artists were committed to interaction between video pictures and the environment. This gave video installations something of the character of environment art. In this way, the specific qualities of the electronic medium are accessible only in the frame of reference of architecture and venue. Finally, in the eighties the spatial reference is taken back, and artists concentrate on sculptural form that represents more than a frame for the video picture. Thus Vittorio Fagone writes on the occasion of the *Video Skulptur* exhibition in the Kölner Kunstverein: "Video sculptures have to be looked at like conventional sculptures, only that it is difficult and unnecessary in this case to define the Wölfflin positions precisely."¹¹ Then, summing up the jubilee exhibition in the Kunstverein: "The emphasis ... lies on sculpture, the definite artistic reference, and less on the media reference of video."¹²

Fagone's seemingly contextless reference, or, put in another way—the express nonreference to Heinrich Wölfflin—engenders a way of looking and thinking that precisely makes the "mixture" quality of Paik's work

comprehensible. The antithetical thinking underlying Wölfflin's classical art-historical *Grundbegriffe* [basic notions], the linear and the painterly, plane and depth, closed form and open form, diversity and unity, clarity and lack of clarity, can be transferred to explain a characteristic of Paik's work, which is also governed by antithetical positions: destruction-construction, technology-archaism, stasis-movement, transitoriness-constancy. This form of thinking and designing is found in provocative theses, in the shape of the work, and in Paik's summarizing observations on culture.

Here, to review: As early as 1959 Paik called his composition *Hommage à John Cage* for tape recorders and piano an Antithesis to Twelve-tone Mannerism.¹³ His video installations *TV Buddha* and *TV Rodin*—two independent works which he showed as an ensemble—embody for him the contrast of Eastern and Western spiritual attitudes in their form as meditation on the one hand and reflectiveness with an inclination toward melancholy on the other. In the *Beuys Vox* catalogue, Paik reflects about his relationship with Joseph Beuys against a background of their different cultural starting points. Beuys's crash on the Crimean peninsula and his encounter with the Tartars are for Paik a reason to represent the collision of two radically different information systems in a pointed fashion. At this point, Beuys embodies "eternity-bound information" from cave paintings to the book, while the culture of the Tartars is characterized by "sequentially retrievable, nongravity-orientated information"—in other words, by music, folktales, speech-song—and at the end of the list Paik places videotape.

His explanations about this take agricultural and nomadic culture as their starting point, and peak in the statement: "They are more experience-oriented than possession-orientated."¹⁴

Destruction—Construction

Paik published a statement in 1965, on the occasion of the twenty-four-hour *Happening* in the Galerie Parnass. The first three passages run as follows:

"Kill Pop Art!
Kill Op Art!
Kill Pot Art!
Kill Paik's Art!

There are two worlds in this world,
not Coloured and UN-coloured
not Communist
and Free Market ...

but

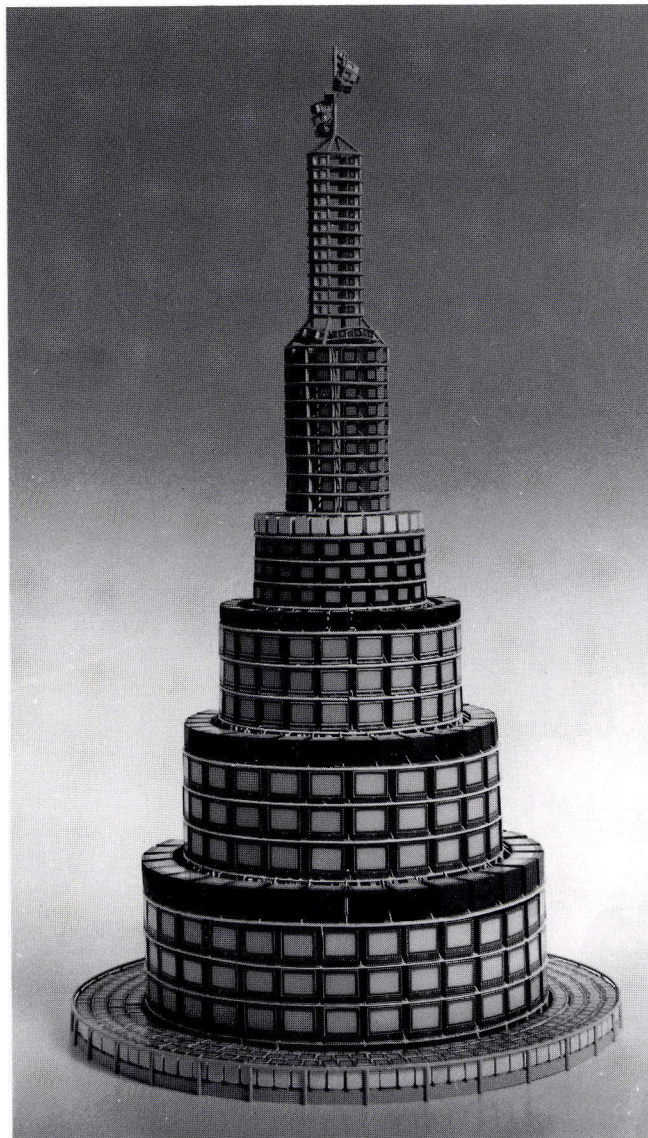
Developed and Underdeveloped.
 We want to have at least as much
 technic that we can hate the technic...
 We want to have at least as much
 welfare that we can despise the welfare.
 We want to have at least as much peace
 that we can be bored with peace...”¹⁵

The opening lines indicate Paik’s position in the Decolagist group, whose oppositional art of the early sixties was aimed at consumer and status symbols. To remain consistent with this view, Paik did not make an exception of his own artistic output. However, he goes beyond opposition, and in what follows develops an antithetical concept indicating a radical change that is characteristic of dialectical development.

There are numerous acts of destruction and gestures of refusal in Paik’s work. In *One for Violin Solo* (1962), he smashes a violin onstage—an act that is also directed against the performance practice of avant-garde music. The video *A Tribute to John Cage* (1973) shows a man with an ax smashing a piano. This sequence is quoting several events: John Cage, who hurls the piano over at the end of a concert, and Joseph Beuys, who at Paik’s first one-man show in the Galerie Parnass (1963) smashed a piano with an ax. Paik interferes with television reception with a magnet and documents the distortion with a video recording—for example, a television interview with Richard Nixon (1967). Here it is not only these pictorial products that are results of distortion for Paik; even the pictures broadcast by the television companies represent a falsification of reality. In other interventions he “cores” the television cabinet and makes it into a container for material assemblages, or he turns the monitor into a chair seat.

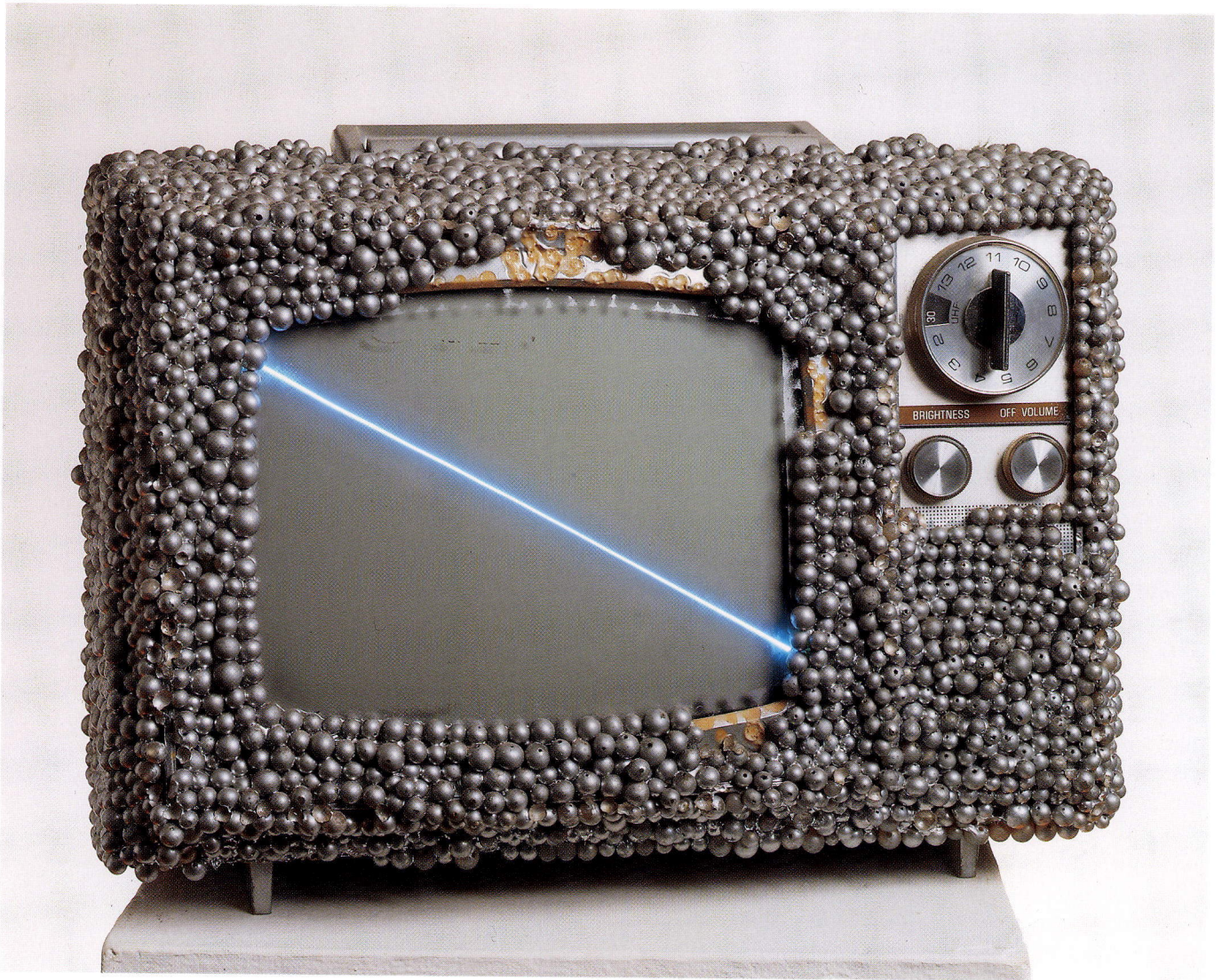
In his tape *Global Groove* (1973), a woman’s voice asks viewers to close their eyes—well aware what a single broadcast minute costs on American television—and another work he calls *Best Television Is No Television at All*, thus negating the medium he chooses as his form of artistic expression. He formulated the central idea in this approach as early as 1964, when he introduced *Robot K-456*, which he had constructed as “technological antitechnology.”

But Paik’s interventions cannot just be described as destruction or deconstruction. Damage and defects can also be the starting point for a new construction. For example, he put a television that had been damaged in transit to his first exhibition on the ground with its screen facedown and dubbed it *Automatic* (1963). Positioned this way, the set, in the sixties a status symbol and window on the world, seems to be recharging to function. As a cubic wooden box, it is now the sculptural dimension that attracts attention. Thus, *Rembrandt Automatic* rep-



Model for *The More The Better*, an installation with 1003 televisions for the Olympic Games in Seoul, 1988 (Photo, Young Kuyun Lim) Courtesy Won Gallery/Hyundai Gallery, Seoul

resents the prototype of television sculpture. Paik took another set that had been delivered defective and stood it on end in the gallery. The television picture, reduced to a vertical line, suggested to him the title *Zen for TV*. The absence of pictures here directs attention to a graphic sign that produces new pictures that are conducive to meditation. The result of destruction thus finds its way to a new construction in concept and form. A television picture subject to interference from a magnet is liberated from the demand of reproducing reality as perfectly as possible, and gains a new optical quality. Or: George Maciunas performs Paik’s violin smashing. Repetition of a destructive act for an audience is a form of reconstruction.



Untitled (television sculpture), 1986
 (Cooperation with Otto Piene)
 Television coated with plastic pearls, 9x13x10"
 Fernanda Bonino, New York

The principle of construction is also accompanied by that of deconstruction. The monitor as a building brick in sculpture, and installation is subordinated to the new function form, from *TV Bra for Living Sculpture* (1969) to the video column in Seoul, *The More the Better* (1988), which brought together 1,003 TV sets. While in the early sixties artists like Vostell were setting television sets in cement or twining barbed wire around them—intended as criticism of the culture industry and television as an instrument of manipulation—in Paik's work the monitor becomes a module as the years go by, and the individual screen becomes a mosaic stone whose function is absorbed into the overall concept, the greater form.

Technique—Archaism

As well as the reversing relationship of destruction and construction there is another antithetical juxtaposition, also determined by the intention of forming analogies: on the one hand the technology of the electronic media and on the other the inclusion of archaic forms (egg) and basic elements like fire (candle) and water (aquaria).

The video installation *Three Eggs* (1981) places the egg at the starting point of a reflection on the real object and the live television picture. *Egg Grows* (1984) takes as its subject the relation between recorded image and projection, between size relationship and spatial references. In

TV Egg (1982) Paik projects video and television pictures onto a glass egg. The shots are distorted by the convex shape of the egg and produce a picture that could come from a time before the first pictures were made, evoking ideas of the primeval substance within the egg.

The candle, as a metaphor for illumination, but also as a sign of transitoriness, appears as a screen substitute in the cored television cabinet (*Candle TV*, 1975). Paik hits the piano keyboard with a candle in his hand and transfers the flickering flame produced onto a screen, using video. In *One Candle* (1989), candlelight is

recorded by a camera and thrown onto the wall by several projectors. As the “electron guns” in the projected beam do not coincide, a multifaceted picture is produced. The starting point for this installation, shaping space and bathing everything in a veil of color, is the light of a single candle.

Paik presents an analogy of moonlight and television light in *Moon Is the Oldest TV*, an installation first set up in 1965. The modified black-and-white sets show circle and circle segment shapes reminiscent of the phases of the moon. “The title is a poetic reference to the beginnings of human history, when moon and stars were the only sources of light. Modern life in big cities has almost extinguished this memory, and the cold light of the domestic television set has replaced the moon.”¹⁶

But beyond this interplay of primeval image and media-technical translation there is also a fictitious relationship between archaism and technology in Paik’s work: A wooden board with the outline of a monitor carved into it and a “snowstorm”—the screen ready to receive, but having no program—has the effect of an engineered picture. In other works by Paik the television cabinet functions as a container. The set is released from context and function and converted to a simple use—just as the peoples called “primitive races” use the products of cultures that have ostensibly grown out of this condition. Paik’s preference for sets from the early days of television—whether they are the ones that are turned into containers or those fitted together as anthropomorphic figures and called *Robots*—seems to be a reference to a relatively rudimentary period in the history of the medium. Seen in this way, the magnet as an instrument for modifying and interfering with the picture is as elementary a tool as an ax when compared with the synthesizer.

Fleetingness and Constancy

Two more diametrically opposed orientation points in the oeuvre are ways of expressing limited temporal presence and continued existence. Thus *Pope Video*, which was alluded to earlier as a pioneering document in the

history of video art, was erased a short time after it was filmed. But Paik kept the videotape case and called it *A Painting Which Exists Only 2x1 Seconds in an Hour* (1965).

Self-portrait I (1983) is a video installation consisting of a monitor and a bronze mask set up opposite it. The tape shows the young Paik (a piece of film shot in 1961) hiding his face from the running camera with his hands in changing poses. A pictorial sequence is cast in bronze—the two hands are placed over mouth and eyes. Perception and articulation are thus fundamentally impaired. Persistent refusal to be filmed and to communicate is set against continuous communication of the electronic image (a loop, and thus converted into a form of constancy).

This pointed confrontation of running image and frozen moment complies with one of the principles that determines the work: sequences of slowing down and stasis are confronted with sequences that accelerate and have a staccato quality. These design modes that are always brought together as an ensemble govern both the pictorial sequence of the videotapes and musical compositions and the course of action in the performances. Thus, for example, the lightning act of smashing the violin is preceded by a long-drawn-out phase of preparation and concentration in which Paik draws back his arm to strike. The video sculptures and installations also express this duality of motion and stillness. The picture always demands heightened attention from the viewer, while the closed form of the monitor structure and the sculptural part of the installation offer a framework where the eye can rest. But there can be a reversal of this relationship of video picture and sculpture built up as dialogue. In *TV Rodin*, the television picture shows a still shot of *The Thinker*, while the bronze copy of the sculpture with its dimensionality, surface modulation, and light reflections demands a great deal more of the viewer’s attention to take it all in.

The Structural Concept

The antithetical positions outlined here with a few examples from Paik’s oeuvre, their interrelationship and associated reversal into an opposite view are the determining components in the “mixture” that is continually present. Structural analysis is also a revealing orientation in Paik’s network of musical compositions and performances, with their adapted musical instruments, television sets, and pictorial additions and sequences used both sculpturally and architecturally. Thus in Paik literature there are recurrent assessments directed at the structural concept. Edith Decker states: “The videotape collage technique is actually not derived from television, but

developed structurally from the early audiotape collages. But the formal as well as the content structure is already in place in the early compositions. Even then Paik was combining fragments of classical music with radio recordings.”¹⁷ And she goes on to say about the tapes: “Enrichment with formal and color effects produced by the synthesizer creates the connection and clamps the heterogeneous pictures together.”¹⁸ This clamping is the structure.

As far as the process of abstraction in processing the pictorial material is concerned, it is true to say that the mimetic structures that are still present in rudimentary form remain recognizable.¹⁹ About *Global Groove* (1973), the classic among Paik’s videotapes, she says: “...in its structure it could serve as a model for all subsequent tapes.”²⁰ Even the presentation of video material in a monitor installation has its structural counterpart. Thus the structure of *Homage to Stanley Broun* is described as obeying a “quasimusical principle.”²¹ In her final summing-up she says: “The videotapes are structurally adapted to the installation and, as more recent development shows, subordinate to it.”²²

Just as Paik uses the example of his friendship with Beuys for reflection on different cultural influences and thus arrives at descriptions of antithetical positions, he also points out things that link up, using structural correspondences as an argument. In retrospect he can explain his particular liking for Béla Bartók’s music in this way, because he identified structures that Bartók has in common with Korean folk music. He also observes that Koreans and Hungarians “share the same Ural-Altaiic grammar” structure.²³ And it wouldn’t be Paik who was making the analysis if he didn’t go on to say that Hungarian goulash and Korean hot beef stew are also the same.

This train of thought is also decisive when Paik relates his personal biography to the larger world around him. He spends most of his time outside Korea, because it is a country “sandwiched between superpowers”—travels that changed his life through “meeting such geniuses as Cage and Beuys. A bittersweet irony...”²⁴ But the “sandwich position” is not passive. Poles—whether they are artists or cultures—become orientation points for Paik. Their resources govern artistic work and life principles. The title picture on the catalogue *Good Morning, Mr. Orwell*²⁵ reflects the dimension of the Paik “mixture.” Paik is standing in front of his *V-ramid*. The words *ART* and *SATELLITE* are inserted, and with all their connotations, they achieve synthesis in his person.

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NOTES

- 1 Wulf Herzogenrath, *Nam June Paik, Fluxus, Video*. Munich, 1983, pp. 66–71.
- 2 Wulf Herzogenrath and Edith Decker, eds., *Video Skulptur, retrospektiv und aktuell 1963–1989*, Cologne, 1989, p. 237.
- 3 Edith Decker, *Paik. Video*, Cologne, 1988.
- 4 *Fluxus. Aspekte eines Phänomens*, catalogue for the exhibition in the Kunst- und Museumsverein Wuppertal, 1981, p. 146.
- 5 Douglas Davis, *Art and the Future: A History/Prophecy of the Collaboration Between Science, Technology, and Art*. New York: Praeger, 1973.
- 6 Decker, see note 3, p. 145.
- 7 David A. Ross, “Nam June Paik’s Videotapes” in *Nam June Paik* (ed., John G. Hanhardt), exhibition catalogue for the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1982, p. 104.
- 8 Karl Otto Götz, “Gemaltes Bild—Kinetisches Bild,” in: *Blätter und Bilder*, vol. 1, no. 5, Würzburg, Vienna, 1959, p. 47. Quoted from Herzogenrath, see note 1, p. 46.
- 9 Davis, op. cit., p. 191.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 220.
- 11 Vittorio Fagone, “Licht, Material und Zeit: Zwischen Videoinstallationen und Videoskulpturen,” in Herzogenrath and Decker, see note 2, p. 35.
- 12 Elke von Radziewski, “Das Medium ist nicht die Botschaft, Ausstellung in Köln: 25 Jahre Video-Kunst,” in *Die Zeit*, April 21, 1989.
- 13 Decker, see note 3, p. 27.
- 14 *Nam June Paik, Beuys Vox*, exhibition catalogue for the Won Gallery/Hyundai Gallery, Seoul, 1990.
- 15 Reprinted in the catalogue for the exhibition *Treffpunkt Parnass, Wuppertal 1949–1965* (eds., Willi Baltzer and Alfons W. Biermann), Cologne, 1980, p. 288 ff.
- 16 Decker, see note 3, p. 69.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 167.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 154.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 188.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 154.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 118.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 92.
- 23 *Beuys Vox*, see note 14, p. 89.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 69.
- 25 *Good Morning, Mr. Orwell*, exhibition catalogue for the Daadgalerie, Berlin, 1984.



Performance by Nam June Paik
at The Kitchen, New York, 1970



The Elements, 1989

Oriental cupboard, 6 televisions, videotape, 3 vases with
silk flowers, plant roots, 27x74x18"
Galerie Eric Franck, Geneva/The Mayor Gallery,
London

F I R E — E A R T H — W A T E R — A I R

The Four Elements of Paik's Work

Anyone who visited *documenta 6* in Kassel in 1977 first went through a vestibule (which at the time was very cramped), then walked past Jennifer Bartlett's many-paneled pictures, then turned right. At that point, there was a gallery toward which crowds of people were drawn by the rock music heard alternating with strains of classical cello and scraps of conversation coming from within. It was, of course, no longer unusual to hear music at an art exhibition, but it was still relatively rare.

Visitors entered a magical, unevenly lit space in which at first nothing could be seen but a raised wooden ramp running all the way around, where fascinated crowds stood looking down into the middle of the gallery at a garden of palms and other tropical plants. Soon they'd become aware of the television monitors concealed under and among the plants, lying face up on the floor like helpless tortoises. The screens presented a videotape collage of an attractive woman (Charlotte Moorman); John Cage talking about silence; and various electronically distorted patterns—all brought together in an entertaining mixture. It seemed to be a new kind of experimental production without further content or comment.

It isn't surprising from today's vantage point that this environment by Nam June Paik, under the official title *Video Jungle*, was one of the most popular and discussed works in the show. At the time, it was still called *Video Komposition X* (in the catalogue), and was related to Paik's earlier *TV Garden*, which was introduced at his first retrospective at the Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse, New York. The TV sets didn't show a continuous, logical sequence of pictures; they presented many segments, like an unassembled jigsaw puzzle. This stimulating Paik design, guided by his musical feeling for rhythm and contrasts, can indeed almost be described as orchestration. Rapid passages follow slow ones; serious subject matter follows light entertainment; technical innovation follows documentary simplicity. Paik summed it up in the catalogue: "In the case of video, space is a function of time, as Kant wrote in his *Critique of Pure Reason*."

But it was not only the videotape that grabbed attention—it was also the entirely unusual placement of the television sets. The cabinets couldn't be seen—only the screens glowing in the half-dark, with the surrounding plants reflecting onto the screens. Television sets were wrested out of their functional, domestic context and used as image-providers. They were no longer noble pieces of furniture or design objects; the screen functioned solely as a source of light and information.

A fundamental element of the installation was missed at the time: the significance of the position and function of the sets on the ground, the EARTH, indeed *as* EARTH. Here the beams of light and video images illuminated and enlivened the jungle plants and the people. The video images—here all played at the same time from a single video recorder—changed the space when reproduced on the thirty color monitors and six black-and-white sets of widely varying sizes.

Paik also sank monitors into the ground, as in a variant on the video *Buddha* (*TV Buddha No. X*, 1974–1982, exhibited at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1982), in which only the screen shines out of a cone of earth, or monitors and sculptures placed on sand or earth (*Hydra Buddha*, 1984, first introduced in the exhibition *The Fourth Dimension: Time* in the Palais des Beaux-Arts Brussels; private collection, Geneva). But it is only here that Paik designed the effect of the television images in such an elementally tangible fashion as the source of life itself, as the sole starting point for the visibility of the world and the possibilities of understanding it. The television images are the EARTH humus for the existence of natural living things in the plant world and artificial living things in the media, of material and immaterial phenomena.

Fish Flies on Sky, with television sets of different sizes hanging from the ceiling, was conceived by Paik in theory and then presented for the first time at the Martha Jackson Gallery in New York in 1975. The original, complete title describes these fundamental components even more clearly in Paik's poetic Fluxus tone: *Fish*

Hardly Flies Anymore on the Sky... Let Fishes Fly Again. The dark ceiling in the dark room makes the picture sources look like faraway stars in the sky. In Paik's 1982 retrospective at the Whitney Museum, visitors could lie down on soft mats and look up into the AIR while resting. Important here was the great height of the gallery and the differences in size and color adjustment of the individual screens, thus creating a poetic variant on "the starry sky above me." A variation on the Whitney grouping is a permanent installation at the Düsseldorf Kunstmuseum, where the AIR element is represented by a low, "rain ceiling," vaulted immediately above viewers' heads. Also introduced at the Whitney was *Imagine There are More Stars on the Sky Than Chinese on the Earth*, an installation with circular projections onto a wall from eight color televisions, distributed like a lane of stars in the darkened gallery, poetic images from a universe that has been conquered in technological terms. Ironically, world pictures are visible as our projections into the AIR-less space of the universe as television pictures; we see only the images produced by ourselves. What is perhaps the most popular version of this AIR use of the video installation was designed by Paik for the Düsseldorf exhibition *von hier aus* in the high-ceilinged hall of the Düsseldorf Messe. There Paik was able to hang five circles of television sets, concentrically becoming smaller, one above the other beneath the roof, thus wafting into being a light, though geometrically precise sculpture reminiscent of architectural models of the cosmos.

Once one traces and accepts EARTH and AIR as the symbolism possibly underlying this creation, then the other two elements WATER and FIRE are even more readily traced to Paik's work. He has repeatedly interpreted the television as an aquarium in which endless drops of information float together to form a mass that is again invisible. In *Sonatine for Goldfish* (1975), an object

Fish Flies on Sky, 1976
Exhibition at Mercer Street Studio, New York
(Photo, Peter Moore)



in the Hahn Collection in the Museum Moderner Kunst in Vienna, the inside has been removed from a television set, and in place of the screen, you see a fish tank with a swimming goldfish. In the same year Paik designed the first installation *Video Fish*, with ten tanks in front of ten monitors for his first European retrospective in the Kölner Kunstverein, and it was bought directly from there by the Musée National d'Art Moderne for the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris. The tough little guppies swam briskly around in their aquariums. They could also be seen apparently swimming through the video pictures behind them; in other words, a collage of fish flying with airplanes through the air, floating alongside rock dancers, or through colorfully ornamental synthesized pictures. The stoical calm of the fish in front of the hectic electronic background was a contrast typical of Paik—like the contrast of the apparently static element WATER with the artificial images in the world in motion.

It would be possible to substantiate FIRE in Paik's work simply by reference to his use of hot electronic images, the color-spraying synthetic qualities, but Paik made FIRE a fundamental element in important installations in a very concrete way. Even in the mid-seventies he equated television electronics with a candle's FIRE energy: in *Candle TV* (in several versions from 1975), he replaced the material electronics of the set with the immaterial light of a candle placed in the empty cabinet. Another *Burnt TV* was created in 1976 as homage to Bob Durham who (as Paik wrote in 1969 in the Düsseldorf *Kalender*) was very important to him. For Durham really did realize something about which many Fluxus artists merely theorized: "Doing nothing." FIRE also ends Beethoven's piano concerto in the videotape *Electronic Opera II*, commissioned by the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1970, as the burning (toy) piano in the image collapses with the last notes of the piano part.

One of the most impressive installations is the *Eine Kerze/One Candle* room, first introduced in 1989 in the Portikus in Frankfurt and immediately purchased by the Frankfurt Museum für Moderne Kunst, which opened in June 1991 with rooms designed by artists Nauman, Turrell, Viola, and others, as well as Paik. A camera records a candle that is really burning and, at the same time, is seen burning on closed-circuit television—the image screened on the wall by several projectors. As today's projectors work with the three color images in red, green, and blue, these color images can also be projected onto the wall in slightly distorted form. Such a consciously controlled out-of-focus image can be created only through the rich nuances of modern projector technology. This approach is typical of Paik: creating new aesthetics from chance and possible error, transformed to precisely suit his content. Thus, room-filling,



Fish Flies on Sky, 1982
Video installation with 40 monitors,
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1982
(Photo, Peter Moore)

seemingly transparent images are created with the flickering FIRE of a candle. Viewers participate because their movement affects air flow and therefore the candle's flicker. Even minimal movement by an individual causes a draft made visible by the enlarged projection of the candle's flicker and flare. So with the aid of the only theoretically static candle image, flickering FIRE occurs no matter how carefully the visitors move. This special quality of video technology, producing pictorial sequences of reality as it happens, was used impressively by artists like Peter Campus and Dan Graham. Paik has used it less often, but in it found one of his most valid formulations: achieving maximum effect with minimal effort, while designing the space-time of life identical to art. Real FIRE here becomes an everlasting life light, but also needs to be established electronically; the FIRE of "eternal light" is kindled by viewers themselves and harnessed in its effectiveness by video technology.

Even though Paik himself didn't identify the FOUR ELEMENTS theme in these installations, it would seem to follow that at one point, an individual object of his would embody them all. In 1990, Galerie Eric Franck

introduced a Paik video sculpture at the *ART-Cologne*: three pairs of two small monitors mounted in a bright-red lacquered Oriental cupboard show colorful, synthesizer-produced high-speed images. Japanese characters for the word *ecstasy* are painted on the red wood, and three long plant roots dangle down from the cupboard's bottom. Sitting on top are three vases holding a single silk flower each. It is easy to understand Paik's title *The Elements*, although an ironic wink puts the weight of its meaning into perspective. The colors blue, red, and yellow of the silk flowers do not represent the basic hues of electronic image structure, but refer to primary-color theory. The roots suck power for their two screens from the air, and the cupboard's open doors can be closed to form a real altar, concealing the video section.

Paik, who was born in Korea but lived in Japan for a long time, did not unambiguously refer in his title for this object to the *four* elements that have determined elemental teaching in our society since the time of the Greeks. In order to harmonize being, which is thought of as unchangeable, with the experience of eternal change, the doctrine of the four elements was invented under the



TV Garden, 1974–1978
Video installation with monitors (number varies)
and plants, Whitney Museum of American Art,
New York, 1982 (Photos, Peter Moore)

Video Fish, 1979
Video installation with 5 monitors and 5 aquariums
Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

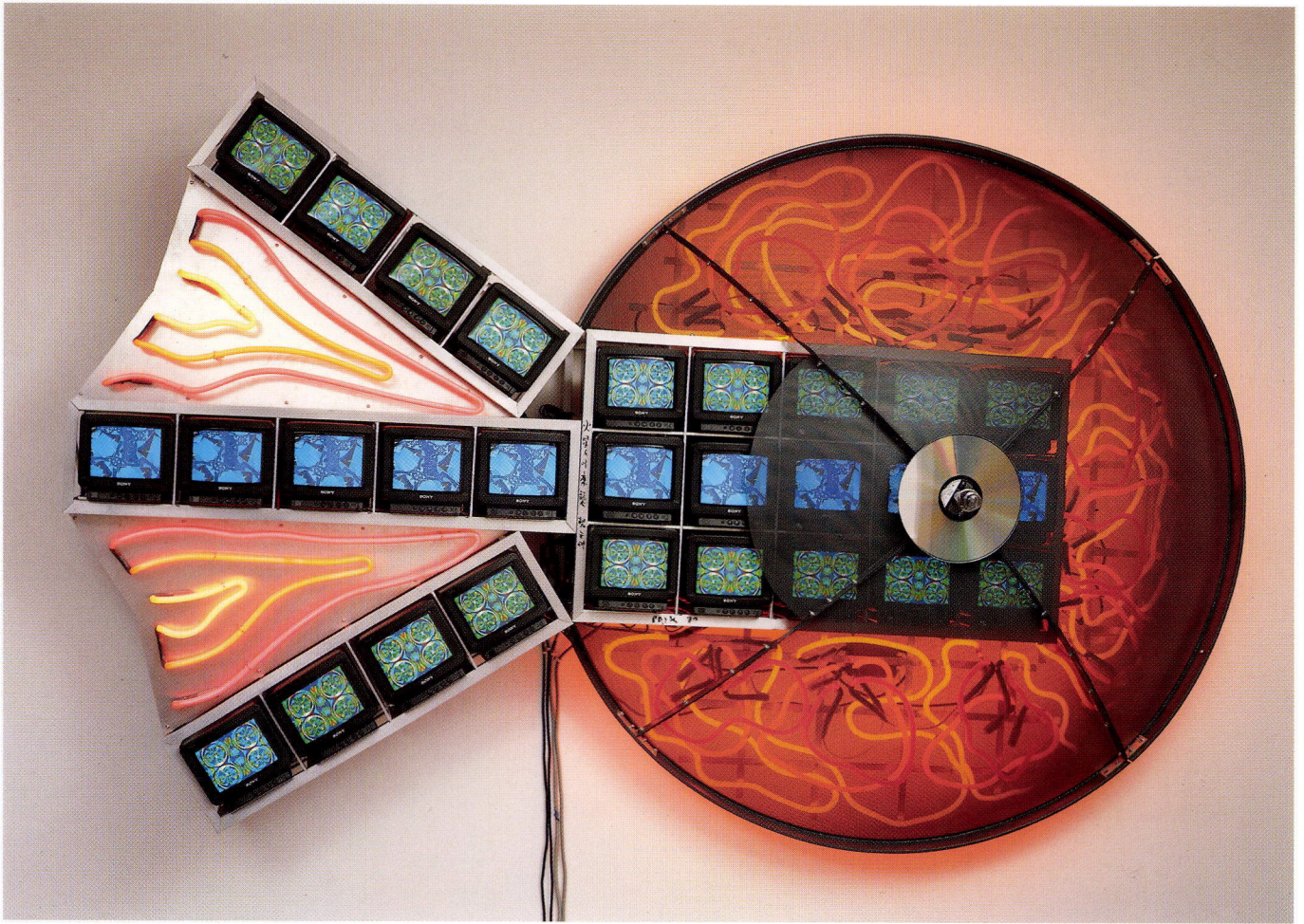


Pythagoreans: Fire, Earth, Water, Air. Ever since Plato and Aristotle, Western thinkers and religions have been concerned with this multiplicity and the symbolic unity of its changing parts.

But for Paik, the Chinese notion of *five* elements could also be involved; they embrace the concepts *Water, Fire, Wood, Metal, and Earth*. The points of the compass, including the center and numerical relationships, and the virtues of rulers are also connected to these elements. With his individual object, Paik could also have implied this “doctrine of the five elements (phases of transformation)” as known in philosophy influenced by China from the third to the second century B.C., for certainly the elements of wood (the cabinet) and metal (the electronics) are more in evidence than the fourth element of the Western unit, AIR.

Paik himself is silent on the subject. He likes multiple interpretations and analyses. For him, acquisition of a work of art by the viewer is a component of the work. He consciously continues to revive this Fluxus tradition,

even, or particularly, in the case of large-scale subjects. It is still astonishing, and leads us to assume a clear conception, uniform thinking, and feeling behind the sequence of his work, which sometimes seems so random. Even if Paik the artist concerns himself more with problems of society, the media, and research into the future in his aperçus—more with his Rockefeller reports or poignant texts than with questions or answers to his own work or the genesis of that work—a network presented like the thematic unity of the FOUR ELEMENTS still produces a key to understanding the work of Nam June Paik. The set of problems described above unfolds in a time frame between 1974 and 1976, but further precision is introduced into the themes later, much of it only in recent years. But in those crucial months Paik grasped the possibilities of presenting a broad spectrum of the human cosmos using video technology. A sequence of impressive works to be interpreted as Western was created under the protection of Dadaist Fluxus irony. Paik illustrated the Four Elements, at first per-



Mars, 1990
 Aluminium, neon, 28 color televisions,
 power lines, cables, satellite dish,
 2 laser disc players, 72x120x72"
 Galerie Hans Mayer, Düsseldorf

ceived as unchangeable (Empedocles), with virtual video images and projections that at first seem so impossible to grasp. This modification through the medium of video demonstrates further development of the intertwined transformation of the Four Elements, as Aristotle also saw it. Here Paik succeeded in combining the physics of the Four Elements with the spiritual and immaterial qualities of video images. Thus he provided an up-to-date representation of world perception dissolving into the immaterial, which in the work of Paul Virilio or Jean Baudrillard a decade later has almost become a self-evident cliché of our media society.

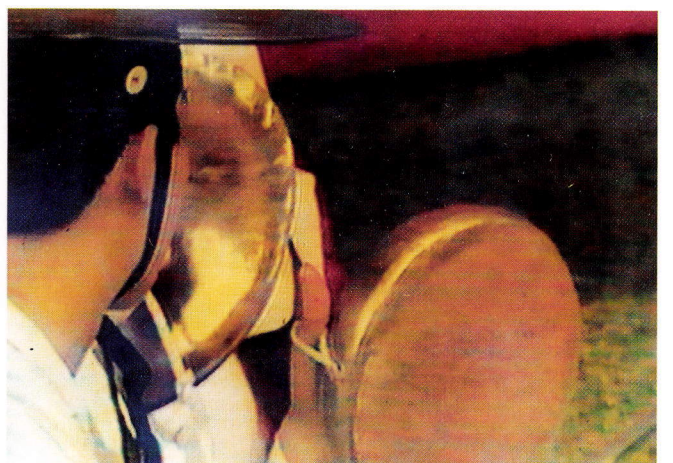
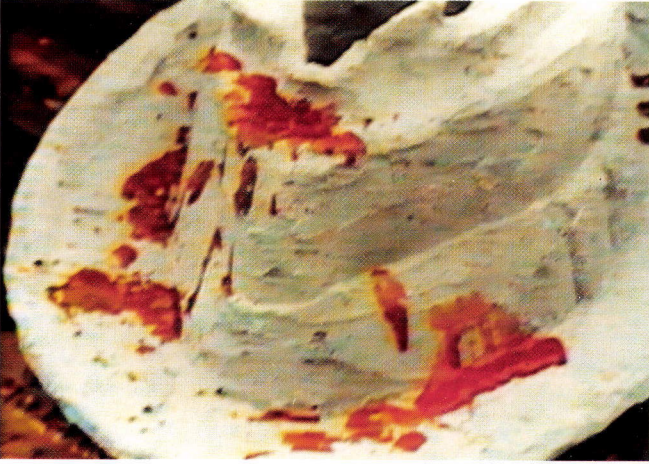
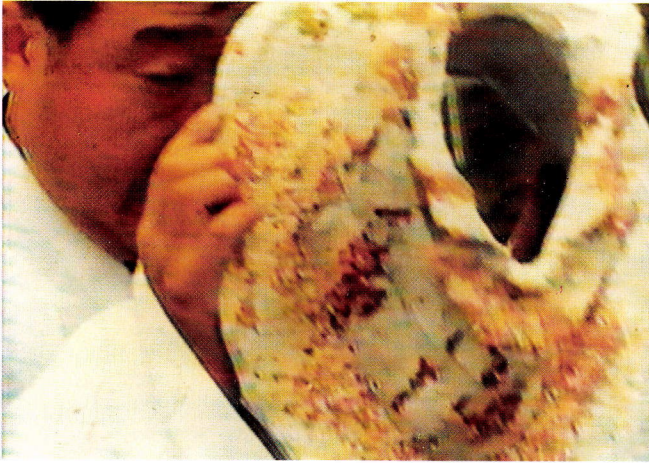
Perhaps the art scene, which is so mobile internationally, with its incredibly rapid communication via print and other media, its exhibitions and art markets, needs just such artists who are at home in several cultural spheres—like Paik, whose own biography links East and West very closely. He has always confirmed how helpful and fundamental to his work his diverse background has been: his training as a philosopher (in Japan), as a

musician (in Korea and Germany), plus his understanding of the most recent technology (learned in the WDR Studio for Electronic Music in Cologne, then in Japan, and finally for decades in the United States), and most particularly, video technology. Viewed in this context, it's quite easy to explain his desire—already fulfilled three times, but constantly bubbling up again—to create live satellite programs for *documenta 6* (1977), *Good Morning, Mr. Orwell* (1984), and *Wrap Around the World* (1989), which reconcile high art and light entertainment and touch on a wide range of cultures simultaneously. But perhaps his installations on FIRE, EARTH, WATER, AIR give to human beings direct, comprehensible steps to understanding the laws of this world, which can and must benefit from correctly used, humanely oriented technology.

Wulf Herzogenrath is Chief Curator at the National Gallery, Berlin.



Admiral, 1976
Console television, artificial flowers, 32x16x19"
(Photo, Wolfgang Träger)
Ute and Michael Berger Collection, Wiesbaden



The Shaman-Rite (KOOT) for Beuys, 1990
Performance by Nam June Paik in Seoul
(Video stills, J. P. Fargier)
Courtesy Won Gallery/Hyundai Gallery, Seoul

THE YELLOW PERIL AND THE WHITE WOLF

"I am the yellow peril!" Paik declared in his pamphlets at the beginning of his career in Europe. Or rather, mixing two languages—and this is a detail of some importance—"The yellow peril! C'est moi." Moreover, he signed his work twice, once in Chinese characters, and once in Roman letters.

Today, now that he has succeeded in his career plan, he could justifiably parody himself with, "I am the white peril."

Let's consider.

The father question.

A perilous question.

It is perilous to remain in the father's house.

Exile. Looking for father figures.

For peers, too.¹

The artist invents his own fathers. Provides an ideal family for himself. As an adolescent in Korea, he discovers Schoenberg. As a young man, he is fascinated by Marx. His chosen father figures are white.

In Korean, *paik* means "white."

Whiter than Paik, and you're dying! Yet as soon as he arrives in Europe, people remind him of his origins. He is yellow. The Korean. The Asian.

Paik sets out to prove that he is more Western than the Westerner—the yellow peril, in fact—and that in being so, he is not betraying his origins, but bringing them to fruition. He is not being false to his roots, which are in Asia, but implementing the program implied in his name, Mr. White.

Thirty years later, he has clearly succeeded. He knows it and he claims it.

In December 1990, at the Galerie Beaubourg, Paris, Paik exhibited a number of works with significant titles: *Better Than Hitchcock*, *Better Than Einstein*, *Better Than Verlaine*, *Better Than Godard*, and even *Better Than Paik*—a ceramic frog facing a frog video (on the same principle as *TV Rodin* and *TV Buddha* works). What is the Korean for *frog*? And *ox*? The frog who tries to blow himself up to the size of an ox. . . . Did you say Beuys?

No, Paik has not done any sculpture "better than Beuys." Impossible. At the most, "as good as. . ."

Beuys is not a father but a brother. A twin brother, even, as I have shown in my book.² With Beuys he must stand on an equal footing. Now that Beuys is dead, Paik offers himself as his double. During a performance in Seoul in July 1990, Paik, in the spirit of the shaman, appropriated to himself Beuys's hat. Cast in cement, with a hole in the crown, and signed by Paik, Beuys's symbolic headgear became an object of Paik's world. In passing his head through this genital breach, he was reborn as white, whiter than white, doubly "white." As Paik and as Beuys.

Early in his career, Paik achieved some notoriety by "castrating" John Cage's tie—an act indicating that he considered him a father figure.

Thirty years later, in Asia, in the land of his hat-selling ancestors (Paik's father and grandfather owned a clothing factory and shop), Paik, in the eyes of all, takes up the heritage of Beuys—an act indicating that he considers him an equal.

They are equals also in that, at almost the same moment in their lives, they traveled the same path, but in exactly opposite directions. The stories of their origins cross each other.

Beuys went from West to East. Paik from East to West. And back again.

1990. . . 1991. . . the journeying is over. The peril is past.³ The beginning of a new decade, in which Paik will reach sixty. In the preface of a book Paik wrote on Beuys, he sees himself approaching the age at which, in his country, old men retire to a hut on a mountain to meditate.

To begin the search.

While we were filming his shamanic performance in Seoul, Paik talked to me about his Zurich exhibition; he said that he was going to call it "remembrance of time. . . video." A little wink at Proust. The other day he phoned and told me he was going to change the title. It would be "remembrance of the wolf. . . past." Or just, "of the wolf." I did not fully understand. And anyway, it could change again. He asked me what the French for *wolf* was.

An excellent idea. Time, making a cooking video, a warmed-up dish. Whenever a critic starts writing about



video, he talks about time; that's the only thing he knows how to do. Yes, time, of course. But an artist laughs at all such theories. What he is searching for is always more ordinary, trivial, inexpressible. Perhaps it is quite simply his position in a bestiary. Between the lunar rabbit of Beuys and his legendary coyote, Paik turns himself into a wolf—of the steppes—of interstellar space. It is as mysterious and transparent as a children's song.

“Are you there, wolf? Can you hear me? What are you doing?”

“I'm pulling on my trousers—my boots—my coat—I'm putting on my hat. I'm coming . . .”

Does Paik know the nursery rhyme?

In any case, in the world (of the arts) Paik is known as the white wolf. Which is another version of the ferret in the song. “He went this way, he'll come back that way . . .” He is everywhere at once. And thanks to satellites, he can travel around without stirring. Like a

fetus in its mother's womb? For example. Or Jonah in the whale.

June 19, 1991

Jean-Paul Fargier is a freelance critic/author on video and film.

NOTES

1 In the French original there is a pun with *père* (father), *péril* (danger), and *pair* (equal).

2 Jean-Paul Fargier, *Nam June Paik*, artpress, Paris 1989.

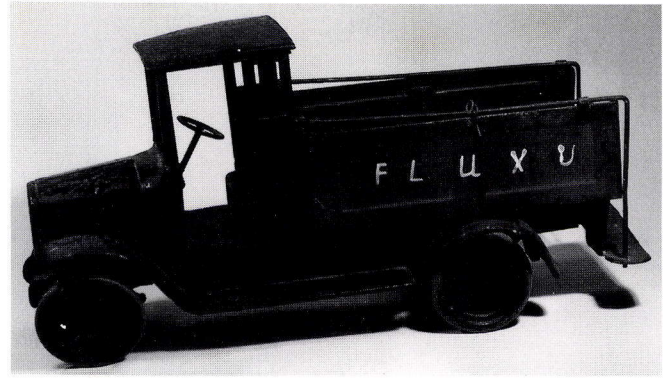
3 In the French original there is a pun with *périple* (round trip) and *péril* (danger).

Mac and Evers, 1989

Video installation with 16 console televisions,
strobe-lights and miscellaneous materials
(Photo, Marc Damage)
Courtesy Galerie de Paris, Paris

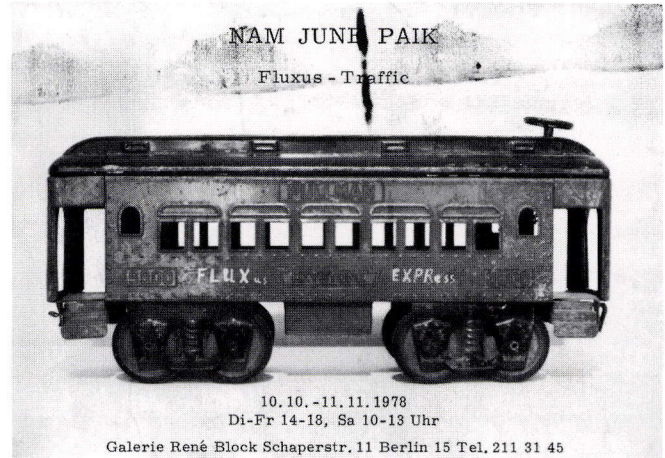
Fluxus Truck, 1977

Toy car with Paik's lettering,
5x26x8"
The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus
Collection, Detroit



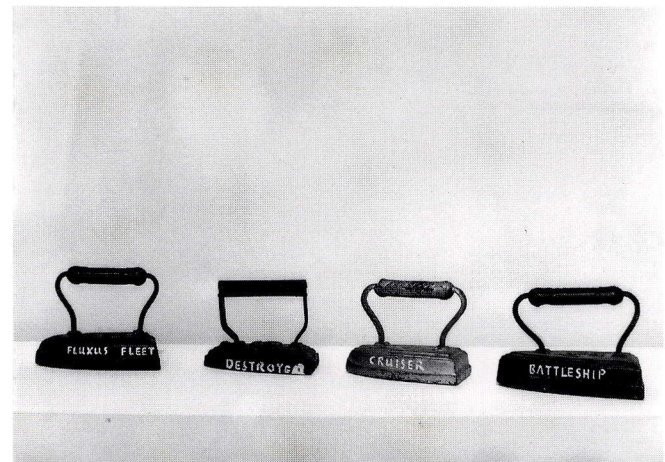
Fluxus Traffic

Invitation to Paik exhibition, Galerie
René Block, Berlin, 1978



Flux Fleet, 1974

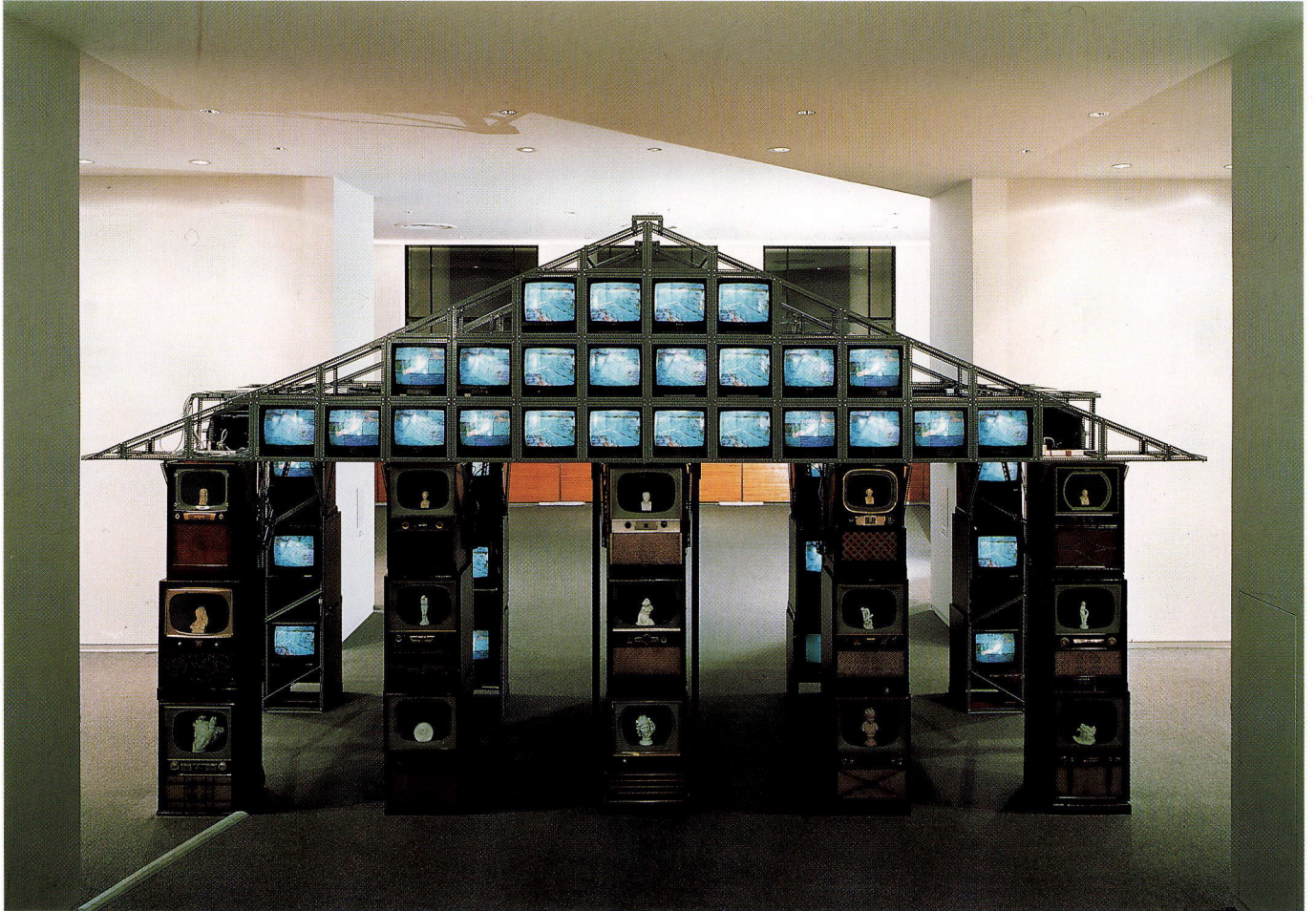
4 old irons with Paik's lettering
(Photo, René Block)



Autobiography, 1978

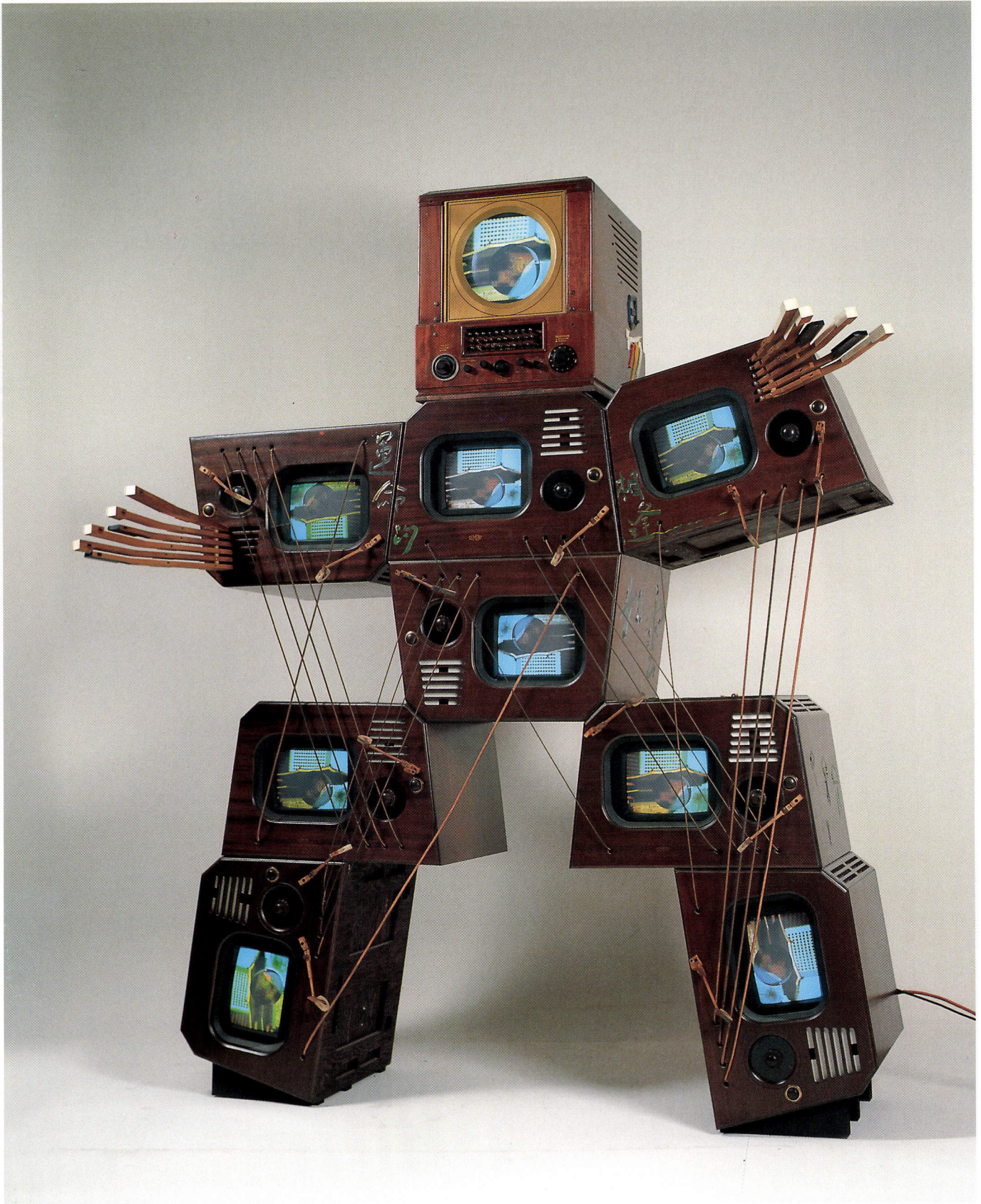
4 wooden toy pianos altered
Eric Fabre Collection, Paris





Madeleine Disco, 1989

Metal framework, console televisions, television monitors,
3 laser disc players, terra cotta statuettes,
resin statuettes, 177x354x118"
Galerie Beaubourg, Marianne and Pierre Nahon, Paris



Cage, 1990
9 console televisions, piano strings, and hammers,
videotape, 88 x 36 x 27"
Carl Solway Gallery, Cincinnati



Video Arbor, 1990
Site-specific sculpture for Forest City
Residential Development, Philadelphia

Paik family at Kum Gang (Diamond Mountain, Korea), circa 1935. Back row: parents, piano teacher Hiduk, maternal uncle; front row: Nam June, brothers Nam Heun and Nam Il, sister Yong Duk, maternal aunt.
(Photo, collection Cho Chang-wo)



Kyung-Hee Lee

Prince and Princess*

There was a very grand house owned by a rich man at the end of an alley. Its front gate was so large, people referred to it as the “House with the Big Gate.” The house consisted of many units: the main building for women, the male quarters, many heated and floored rooms distributed within the spacious compound. There was a hill in the rear garden. It was so large that children were scared away from it. The owner didn’t welcome neighborhood children into the house, and for this reason, they never entered it.

There lived in the house a boy named Nam June, who was my classmate in kindergarten. Since our mothers were good friends, I was often able to visit the big house with her.

Nam June’s mother would take me to a room painted in different colors and give me wonderful delicacies such as taffies coated with sesame powder, fried rice cakes, other fried cakes made of flour, honey, and oil, and some tangerines, and would tell me to go play with Nam June and share the treats with him.

But often I would just sit down quietly, being too shy to go to Nam June, because when I did, he would just disappear from where we played without saying a word. Then his mother would go find him and ask him to come back to play with me, reminding him that his good friend had come to be with him.

And there we would find Nam June, with picture books spread before him almost filling his room. He would look at all those books without ever casting a glance at me. He had lots of picture books from the big publisher Kodansha, and whenever I visited his house, I saw them all over his room—books with fascinating pictures that Nam June knew I wanted very much to see.

At last, Nam June and I became good enough friends to take one book each to the hill in the garden and read them sitting side by side on a stone chair. We would spend our time together without saying much of anything, until my mother would come to take me home. It probably looked to others as if we were very close. And I was fond of Nam June, even though he didn’t like to speak. I thought of him as the prince in one of those Kodansha picture books, because he was always dressed in handsome clothes, right in fashion, and wore a short, “round” haircut.

I fancied myself as a princess, right out of the same picture book—a book where the prince and princess cared for each other a lot without exchanging words.

Everyone in Nam June’s family, including his mother and his older sister (a teenager whom I thought of as a grown-up) called me Nam June’s bride. I was told that one day when little Nam June was crying about something, his mother warned him, “If you keep crying, I won’t let you marry Kyung-Hee!” So, secretly,

I became sort of Nam June's bride, and secretly, I enjoyed it. But, I thought to myself, I'll really become bashful if I am actually treated like his bride.

The Paik family owned a big car. Through Nam June's kindness, I was driven to our kindergarten class with him—perhaps the first time I had ever ridden in a private car. Our school was then near Myungdong Street, on the present site of the YMCA. When we got out of Nam June's car, we were surrounded by a big crowd of children. Though I seemed pretty calm and cool outwardly, I felt embarrassed inwardly, and would run away as soon as I was out of the car. Nam June just kept silent, as he had before, when we were riding in the car. And the whole experience made me feel as if my family was a poor one compared with the rich Paiks. I felt self-conscious about my clothes, I looked down and clutched my lunch box. At such moments, only one thought ran through my mind: The electric lights in your back garden were all set up by my father. Did you know that, Nam June? The Paik family had a while ago hired my father, who was a worker with an electric company, to install lamps in their garden, to reflect on the beautiful cherry blossoms at night. I had always felt proud of my father's work and those lights that made the garden so beautiful.

Many years later, after I had had my first child, I happened to meet Nam June's older sister on the street. She recognized me at once, and seemed very pleased to see me. "Seeing you reminds me of Nam June," she said. "He is in Germany now doing funny art—avant-garde art, they say. He is still single. How I wish he were here to see you!"

I was dumbfounded, and grew very quiet, feeling very shy. They still regarded Nam June and me as a couple! But the days when Nam June and I had played prince and princess were long gone, as if a dream.

* *Kyung-Hee Lee, a childhood friend of Paik's, is a well-known Korean author. Her story "Prince and Princess" was published in the anthology Mountain Comes Back, Sok-Am Books, Seoul, 1970.*



Exposition of Music, Galerie Parnass, Wuppertal, 1963 (Photo, Rolf Jährling)
The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection, Detroit

Kate Millett

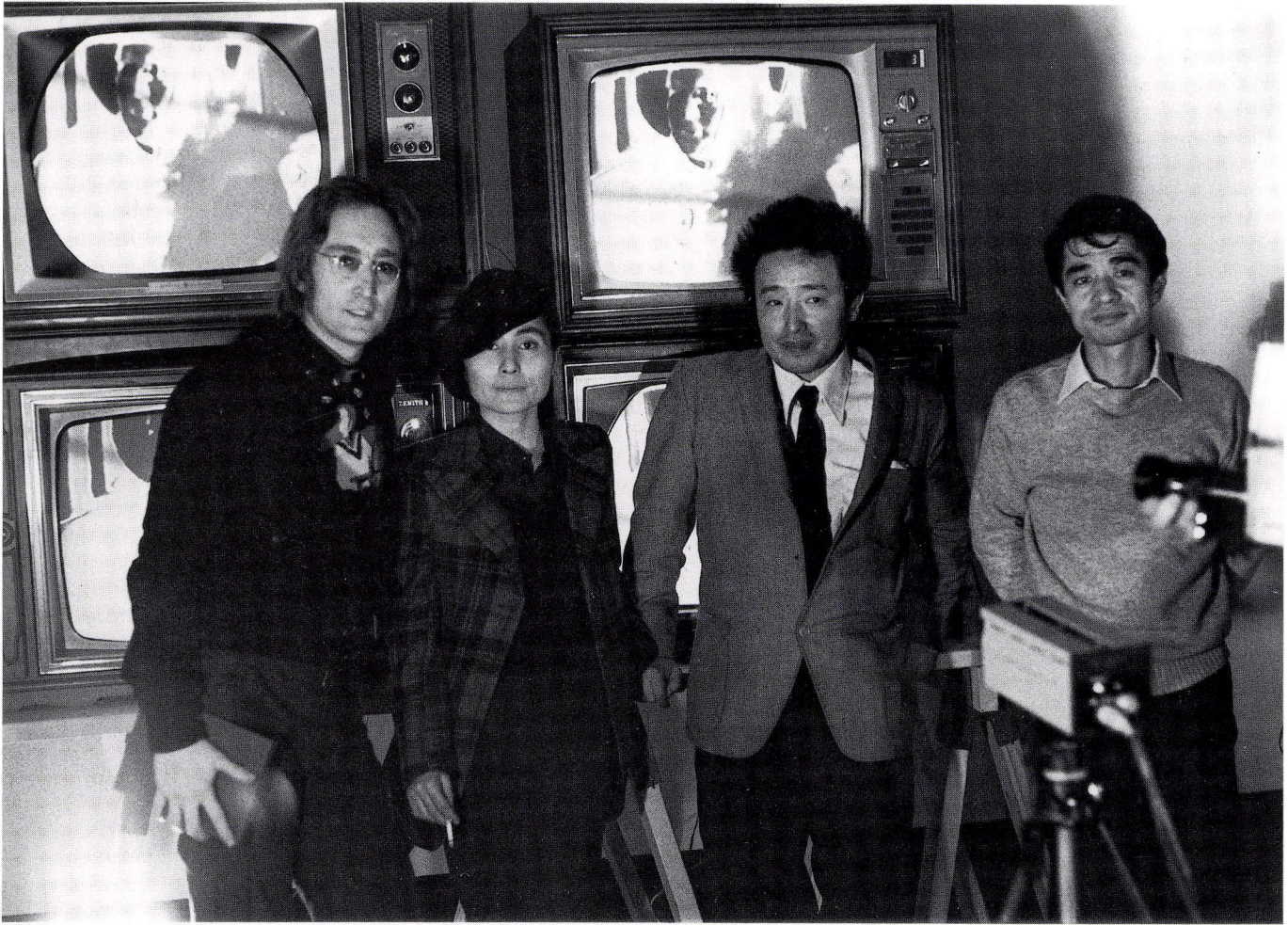
Bonyari

I sat next to Nam June at a Fluxus dinner in a fancy restaurant in SoHo a few years ago. A Flux collector had collected us all in one place and was feasting us; whatever it meant to him, it was a big deal for us, because we were together as a gang; there may have never been so many of us in one room before—we turned one another on. Yoko entered like a queen, the Flux kids were stars for a night, we were making out big. We felt very grown-up and famous. Teasing Nam June, I said, "You know, maybe the reason you get by with what you do here, everything you've gotten away with here"—we smiled at each other—"is really all because you're *bonyari*." Nam loved this, he remembered it. What did I mean?

It was an aside, artist to artist, both of us having lived in Japan as outsiders. The word of course is Japanese, not his lan-

guage, not mine, but one whose nuances and values we were able to learn from (Nam June studied at Tokyo University and took a degree there; his Japanese is excellent, mine was always poor), a language that expresses certain meanings which have no exact equivalent in English.

Bonyari may be untranslatable in English but I'll try: a rough equivalent might be "vague," possibly even "the appearance of absentmindedness"; "an innocent and distracted manner"; a way of seeming to be thinking of something else. What I meant is that no one in this culture, myself included at times, could ever quite understand the revolution which Nam June has plotted and brought to a certain quiet but effective conclusion. Without boastfulness or assertion, without a great masculine or egotistic fanfare, perhaps without even giving away his hand until the work was done. No one ever quite imagined it be-



Nam June Paik with John Lennon, Yoko Ono, and Shuya Abe at Bonino gallery, New York, 1971 (Photo, Thomas Haar)

forehand. Maybe he didn't either, one thing led quietly to another. But we certainly never saw it all coming.

They probably didn't at Tokyo University either, where, like his Asian classmates, Nam June Paik, between the years of 1953 and 1956, diligently absorbed Western music and culture. Yet even here he was an outsider; the little picture in his passport is a Korean face; *Cho-sen-jin* was a word said through the teeth even in 1961 when I lived in Japan. Japan had conquered Korea, humiliated and expropriated it in its cruel imperial expansion, still so recent. It had tried the same with China and failed. No Chinese or Korean ever forgot.

I reaped what the *Gai-jin* (white foreigners) had sowed in Hiroshima and after the American G.I. occupation: a continuous subtle public ridicule from strangers, but also a great kindness and hospitality from every Japanese I came to know personally, nearly all of them ar-

tists. A penurious young sculptor, and that rare thing then, a female Caucasian, resentful at being mocked for how American military had behaved and profoundly grateful for the overwhelming goodness of those friends who took me in—after all, Japanese women artists didn't get the encouragement I did—I was aware that in my own person I didn't quite deserve either of these responses. It was just history; you voyaged out and you were lonely or lucky but you bumped into it.

Nam June must have felt the hard hand of history even harder in the fifties while studying in Tokyo; his life as a student at "Todai," formerly the Imperial University, the greatest university in Japan, still elite and exclusive, must have been full of that prejudice and withering scorn one heard always directed toward Koreans. But Nam's journey to Tokyo in 1956 (after Hong Kong, where the Korean War had driven his family) was a journey

to the best education that could be found in the East at that time. Just as his later journey to Germany was a further extension of that long and difficult apprenticeship to serious music.

If Tokyo was hard, what was it like in Germany? Maybe he had built a shell, had already perfected that manner of being a foreigner, a refugee artist: thick-skinned, a little strange, a little funny, a bit of a clown, harmless, diffident, ineffably an outsider. An artist only safe among other artists, people who could transcend their own inherited expectations and embrace one so different but so original, so playful. I remember my Japan; I think of Maciunas himself, later in America, or Daniel Spoerri, both refugees, Flux persons in hostile new worlds, always surviving the local culture through one they formed around themselves.

From studying classical composition Nam June appears to have made an easy

transition into the avant-garde; as a very young man he is already participating in events with Karlheinz Stockhausen and John Cage. Of course this was more interesting than the pursuit of an empty Western classicism; he had already seen through that in Tokyo, now he was with those who did it and made it all new, the real ones. He never left them. In one piece after another he has given homage, memorialized, remembered those who gave him life and direction.

Cage of course. But even more Duchamp. Fluxus itself is the extension of Duchamp by other means and other minds. In Fluxus we thought of ourselves as “the children of Duchamp.” It was even logical, we were still youngsters; here was an old man and a monument. For some of us—Yoko Ono, Shusatsu Arakawa, Fumio Yoshimura Nam June, and me—Duchamp was the master whom our master in Tokyo, the poet Takiguchi, whom we always referred to as “Takiguchi-sensei,” had admired so, that he wrote a book in appreciation. Coming all the way from Tokyo, it was one of the first such appreciations anywhere. Duchamp informed the spirit of the Yomiuri Independent Exhibition in Tokyo, staged every year in the sixties by young Japanese artists, the greatest collection of Dadaism in the world. A crazy big Zen monster show that filled an entire museum for a month. In 1963, I was a participant and invited Jean Tinguely to walk through it; he couldn’t believe his eyes. John Cage came to Tokyo with Yoko that year; Nam June was back in Tokyo that year, concocting a robot that walked, talked, and even shit beans. Then the invasion began to reverse itself; everyone went back to America and Fluxus.

For Nam June, Fluxus began even earlier. He met Maciunas in Europe in 1961 and began collaborating with Wolf Vostell in Flux collage. By June of 1962, he was already performing in *Neo-Dada in der Musik*, a group Fluxus performance in Düsseldorf. In February of 1963 he participated with Maciunas and Higgins in *Festum Fluxorum Fluxus* and premiered his own Champion Contest event. After that there was no stopping him. A month later, with his first one-man show in March, *Exposition of Music—Electronic Television* Nam had discovered Video.

In video Nam June Paik reinvented everything: music, painting, and sculpture, literature and criticism and aesthetics and theory, politics and society and culture and civilization itself. But as a

sculptor I would like to emphasize what a brilliant sculptor Nam June is as well. This first exhibition not only included thirteen television sets, it included some of the most wonderful sculptures I have ever seen: a dismembered mannequin in a bathtub; the noisemaker *Random Access*; and a number of brilliantly and beautifully sculpted and transformed pianos, especially the great *Klavier Integral*.

Throughout all the work he’s done, Nam June has been making sculptural images of the wildest and most inventive sort. In our amazement at what he has done for or against the technology of video, we have often failed to understand Nam June as a sculptor and painter, designer and collagist. The great visual imagination that this musician has brought to time and space and the arrangement of objects, the amazing beauty and innovation of his work in the fine arts is an outsider’s secret. In fact, anyone who can take an object as rigid and predictable and banal as a television set, the set itself, and make something sculptural out of it, has transcended a great deal.

All along he had tricked the machine that tricked us, put a magnet on the damn thing and turned its boring commercial image into abstract art. Then come the great symphonies of sight in his video-collage art: color becomes music in *Global Groove* and *Guadalcanal Requiem*. The other day, back home in Minnesota, I stumbled across Nam at the Walker, an installation of his coming upon me by surprise: I watched in envy, having grown up on its banks, realizing that Nam, who had come from so far away and had traveled everywhere had found my own river, my heart’s home, and had seen it into art. Nam June Paik is, by his own admission in the letter he sent me the other day, a “Mongolian-Manchurian-Korean nomad.” So I stood still an hour, my eighty-eight-year-old mother by my side, appreciating the way Nam had made off with the whole Mississippi River. This is a protean *bonyari*, a divine vagueness. This is getting by with a great deal.

May 14, 1991, New York

Author Kate Millett is a prominent member of the American women’s movement.

Nam June Paik with Shigeo Kubota, New York, 1974 (Photo, Thomas Haar)



Nam June Paik*

Nam June Paik was first known to us in the early sixties as a cultural terrorist. This man of solid pursuits in art history, musicology, philosophy, and technology—so utterly at home in the cultures of East and West—shocked his musical audiences: sudden rippings of others' neckties; his soap-lathered head plunging, screaming into a washtub, nearly drowning; his demolitions of pianos. Paik was the all-too-live embodiment of his ironic assertion that the relative is the absolute, and vice versa.

But it is Paik the TV experimentalist who concerns us now. He has put aside, for the time being, dramatic performance for a medium that seems cool and detached. Yet his electronic "invasion" of standard video transmission is merely a sophisticated analog to his former activities as terrorist of aesthetic expectations. He destroys the TV sets' normal function as he destroyed the piano's. His scientific manner today is no less decisively unorthodox (engineers say he does everything he shouldn't) than were his musical manners in the concert hall. But out of electronic devastations emerge miraculous visual joys (everyone admits this), as from the cataclysmic piano anyone could hear astonishing sounds (if he only listened).

Of course, no one was really harmed by Paik in the past, although the warnings abounded. Similarly, at present, nothing is really lost by his deflections of the video information pattern. (His pianos, incidentally, were old and irreparable, and his television consoles are cast-off derelicts from Canal Street, which will also play normally.) Energies are simply rechanneled. Paik's terrorism is philosophical rather than truly destructive. As he shook up the habits of our minds in the past, he shakes up the electrical pathways in the television brain. If only to clear the air for wonderment and positive action. Once cleared, work begins.

On the viewing screen, Surrealism is revived: An announcer's face, his eye on his ear, stretched like Silly Putty, rolling flaccidly into a vortex, the voice extolling hairspray. Achieved by the flick of a dial, or the manipulation of an electromagnet. Simply and without complication. We all can do it. The movies could never so directly, or so cheaply, or so potentially democratically, engage in the visual fare of everyday life.

Or: given the hyperbrilliance of the colored phosphors of the cathode ray tube, anyone is able to virtually produce Op paintings, still or in motion, in a variety and complexity of ways quite unavailable to conventional media.

Similarly, the styles of Minimal and Serial painting can be produced at will, with the significant difference that we, as participant-creators, are affecting such changes within a totally electrical situation. The shift to telelight from the light of paint, qualitatively charges otherwise familiar configurations with an intimacy, and at the same time, an intangibility that paintings do not possess.

One screen yielded alternately Monet's *Waterlilies* and a psychedelic light show. The latter, flowing out of the former, transformed a ball game into six or more horizontal bands which rolled slowly toward the viewer like curling surf. Another screen produced an eclipse of the moon from its internal workings. Another, endless mirror images of whatever was broadcast at the moment.

The flexibility of the telemedium appears potentially infinite. In time, Paik will discover inexpensive ways to increase the range of shape and scale of the viewing field, to multiply the monitor units environmentally in time as well as in space, and to facilitate networks of direct video interchange between artists and public, with each person influencing the resultant process.

The implications of such possibilities, added to his current pioneer achievements, have not escaped him. Paik's writings on broad aspects of contemporary culture, and on education, are rich with specific recommendations. In a recent paper prepared in connection with research he is conducting at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, he outlines some dozen probing, and quite possible, ideas.

Among them is his "Instant Global University," comprised of computer-stored and mailable videotapes, from which any Westerner could study, say, Asian musical instruments under the best performers available; also, all music manuscripts of past and present could be collated and cross-referenced for instant retrieval. Art history, as well, studied in this form, would make conventional texts obsolete. Television, in concert with holography, could amplify not only our studies of three-dimensional and multimedia arts, but could also be helpful in physics and mathematics; electronics as such becomes vividly palpable once Paik's "interventions" are literally seen.

Elementary-school children, increasingly tuned to an electronic world, can be communicated with and taught in all these ways, as well as taught to draw directly in the kinetic space of the cathode ray tube. It would go a long way toward shortening the great distance between current knowledge and current instruction of the young.

Most important of all, Nam June Paik is embracing as a whole, artist, spectator, medium, creativity, education, and social welfare. The West, until lately, has traditionally separated these, and it may be some time before the majority of us will accept the change he is helping to bring about, and act on it. Paik's early performance pieces terrified chiefly because we sensed the opening-out-to-the-world he was embarking on. His knowledge of, and respect for, the past was a condition for his forceful liberation from its grasp. Today, he is among the most modern of us.

* This article originally appeared in *Electronic Art II*, 4/17–5/11, 1968, No. 32. Galeria Bonino Ltd., New York.

Allan Kaprow currently teaches in the Visual Arts Department of the University of California, San Diego. In 1967, he was affiliated with the State University of New York, Stony Brook, where he invited Paik to be artist-in-residence.

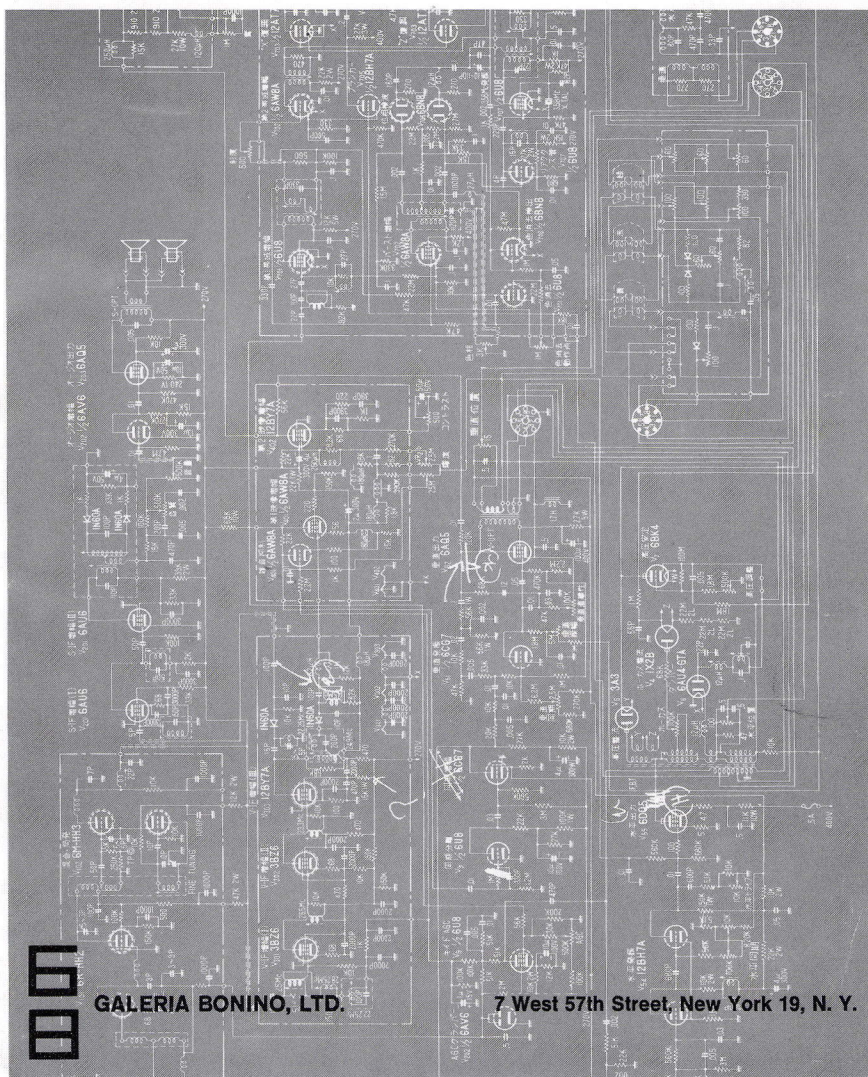
Nam June Paik: electronic art II, 1968
Flyer for the exhibition at the Galeria
Bonino, New York, 1968

Etude for Pianoforte, 1960
Nam June Paik and John Cage in Mary Bauer-
meister's studio, just after the necktie
performance, Cologne

Poster by George Maciunas for *Fluxfest* at
Hippodrome with Nam June Paik's *Fluxsonata 4*,
at Anthology Film Archives, New York, ca. 1975

NAM JUNE PAIK

electronic art II



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Jonas Mekas

November 11, 1965

On New Directions, on Anti-Art, on the Old and the New in Art*

For a number of years now, the avant-garde artist (in cinema, and in other arts) felt, and publicly insisted, that he was creating something so different from the traditional art that his work, he felt, could be defined as anti-art. And he was right. He had to take that attitude. The artist is always right, even when he is wrong. That attitude was his liberating acetylene wedge to bore into the heart of the always new reality.

But now, with five, six, seven years' perspective, these far-far-out and anti-art works begin to fall into the same thousand-year-old treasury of all art. I realized this suddenly when I watched Nam June Paik's evening. His art, like the art of La Monte Young, or that of Stan Brakhage, or Gregory Markopoulos, or Jack Smith, or even (no doubt about it) Andy Warhol, is governed by the same thousand-year-old aesthetic laws and can be analyzed and experienced like any other classical work of art.

* From Jonas Mekas, *Movie Journal: the Rise of the New American Cinema, 1959-1971*, New York: Macmillan (1972), p. 209.

Critic/author Jonas Mekas writes extensively on the arts.





John Cage

On Nam June Paik's "Zen for Film" (1962–64)*

On the nature of silence: Well now, you know that I've written a piece called 4'33", which has no sounds of my own making in it, and that Robert Rauschenberg has made paintings which have no images on them—they're simply canvases, white canvases, with no images on them—and Nam June Paik, the Korean composer, has made an hour-long film which has no images on it. Now, offhand, you might say that all three actions are the same. But they're quite different.

The Rauschenberg paintings, in my opinion, as I've expressed it, become airports for particles of dust and shadows that are in the environment.

My piece, 4'33", becomes in performance the sounds of the environment.

Now, in the music, the sounds of the environment remain, so to speak, where they are, whereas in the case of the Rauschenberg painting, the dust and the shadows, the changes in light and so forth, don't remain where they are but come to the painting. In the case of the Nam June Paik film, which has no images on it, the room is darkened, the film is projected, and what you see is the dust that has collected on the film. I think that's somewhat similar to the case of the Rauschenberg painting, though the focus is more intense. *The nature of the environment is more on the film*, different from the dust and shadows that are the environment falling on the painting, and thus less free.

* From *Cinema Now*, H. Currie and M. Porte, eds., University of Cincinnati, 1968; reprinted in *Electronic Art III*, 11/23–12/11, 1971, No. 48, Galeria Bonino Ltd., New York.

Dichtung und Wahrheit (Poetry and Truth), 1961–1972

Various Paik possessions, including an old suitcase, address book, and calendars from 1961 to 1972,

11x15x8"

Museum Moderner Kunst Ludwig Foundation, Vienna

Former Hahn Collection

Studienbuch

School notebook, photos, and other Paik autobiographical memorabilia mounted on wood (Photo, Wolfgang Träger)

Ute and Michael Berger Collection, Wiesbaden



Nam June Paik

Honesty*

In 1964, we were preparing for the Stockhausen opera *Originale*, and went into a coffee shop (downstairs, on the corner at Carnegie Hall). Charlotte Moorman, Ginsberg, and others were there.

Allen first checked his pocket and counted his change: seventy cents. Then he ordered coffee and french fries. The food was delivered. He put a lot of ketchup on the french fries—this was his lunch—and he said, “In America, the only thing that’s free is ketchup.”

The next year, Charlotte and I were broke in Paris. We tried the same trick in Montmartre—however, this time, ketchup cost extra—fifty old francs.

During the performance of Stockhausen, there was a routine in which I take a bath in an old tin basin, fully dressed, scoop up the very dirty water (not only were my clothes dirty—they were smeared with shaving cream and ketchup) in my equally dirty shoe and gargle with this water, then spit it out. One day (there were five consecutive nights), I asked the audience if anyone would drink some water from my shoe. Allen said, “Bring it here!”—and drank a half-shoeful of water.

I was awe-struck. This guy is an *honest* guy who *does* what he says he’ll do!

Allen, Peter, and Gregory came to see Stockhausen at Mary Bauermeister’s

apartment on Riverside. After a little conversation, Allen offered a joint. Stockhausen said, “I don’t need it.” Allen said, “The whole of *Kontakte* is in one puff of this.” (*Kontakte* is an electronic masterpiece of Stockhausen.)

In 1971, at Yoko Ono’s opening at the Everson Museum in Syracuse, New York, at about midnight, the crowd got unhappy and tense. Allen starting chanting and didn’t stop for two hours. Charlotte cried—and the huge crowd went home happy.

Allen must be taken seriously as a serious composer in a music-historical sense, just as Cage must be taken seriously as a writer. Allen is too original a composer to be put in any category of music history by official music critics or historians.

* From *Best Minds, A Tribute to Allen Ginsberg*, Bill Morgan and Bob Rosenthal, eds., Lospecchio Press, New York, 1986.

Allen Ginsberg
Tyger. Portrait of Nam June Paik, 1991

Douglas Davis

Electronic Wallpaper*

It was zero hour in the studio of Boston's WGBH-TV, the moment, earlier this month, when *The Ultimate Machine* was about to project its first luscious, iridescent colors and shifting abstract forms onto screens throughout Boston, making history for both art and television. Nam June Paik, an artist turned inventor, stood before one of the machine's several cameras, holding a wildly blinking ring of Christmas-tree lights in his hand. Suddenly he turned away. "No," he announced, "this is participation TV, for everybody: the first image on the program shouldn't be me." He reached out for a little girl, aged about seven, pushed her before the camera, and thrust the ornament into her hand.

As the first image, composed of the little girl's hand, the lights, and a backdrop of kaleidoscopic colors, hit the air, so did the soothing, syrupy, voice of an announcer: "This is a video commune," he said, "featuring the world's first video synthesizer. This program runs for four hours without interruption. Treat it like electronic wallpaper. This program has no beginning, no end." While he continued—and while Paik's colleagues played with the controls of his machine, creating abstract and bizarre images—the creator explained his actions, off-camera. "The little girl was very important. We made the machine to be simple, so that everyone can create TV images, not only artists. It's an electronic watercolor set for the whole world."

Exploits: The machine may be simple—in operation—but the man behind it isn't. A Korean nurtured in the rich avant-garde atmosphere of American art, Paik was the first sculptor to make the television set a medium for art as well as network entertainment. He bought secondhand sets, twisted their insides out, until they produced strange, twisted images instead of the straight, representational TV picture. Paik's "Set Art" has been displayed in galleries and museums throughout the world.

His exploits brought him a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation for residence at WGBH-TV, Boston's NET outlet and the nucleus of experimental TV programming in the United States. Paik decided to build a cheap, portable "mixing" machine that one man could play, like a piano. After months of work in Japan, aided by a brilliant engineer named Shuya Abe, he completed what he calls *The Ultimate Machine*, an innocuous



Douglas Davis, Nam June Paik, Charlotte Moorman, and Peter Iden at the opening of *documenta 6*, live TV program, Kassel, 1977 (Photo, Ludwig Winterhalter)

Fred Barzyk, Shuya Abe, and Nam June Paik with the video synthesizer at WGBH-TV, Boston, 1971



array of monitors, tiny TV cameras, and a console about the size of a small piano, covered with knobs and buttons.

In that first telecast earlier this month, Paik and his friends fed imagery of all kinds into the battery of tiny cameras: live, mugging human faces (distorted by magnets held above the cameras), crumpled bits of colored paper, spinning turntables covered with abstract drawings. Back at the console, these images were “synthesized” by playing with the control knobs. Colors of every hue were splashed upon them. Sometimes the images were fed straight, one at a time, to the viewer; more often they were mixed together, producing a brilliant and continually shifting kaleidoscope of forms, overlaid by a musical mix—from recorded Beatles music to live electronic music and occasional taped snatches from Japanese television.

Monet: The viewers’ reactions were confused but excited. WGBH’s switchboard lit up all night. One man complained he was getting signals from Tokyo instead of Boston. “We are moving in TV away from high-fidelity pictures to low fidelity,” said Paik, “the same as in painting. From Giotto to Rembrandt the aim was fidelity to nature. Monet changed all that. I am doing the same.”

Paik’s four hours cost eight hundred dollars to produce, his machine a mere thirteen thousand dollars to build, both fractions of conventional control-room costs. Already additional machines have been ordered from Paik and Abe by two colleges preparing to teach television as an art form, and the machine is scheduled for display before the electronics trade in the fall. Ready or not, the age of electronic watercolor is now within reach for TV stations—and people—both big and small.

* From *Newsweek*, August 24, 1970, page 34.

Douglas Davis has written extensively on communication arts.



TV as a Creative Medium, 1969
Exhibition leaflet, Howard Wise Gallery, New York, 1969
Sohm Archive, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart

Howard Klein

Paik: Prescient and Practical Adviser

Philanthropies, free from the pressures of commerce and politics, are unique among contemporary social institutions in their capacity to think ahead, to anticipate future needs, and to provide funds for the examination of questions which may be central to a consideration of newly developing world or local situations but, because these questions may be overshadowed by current crises, are deemed less urgent by other institutions and therefore put off until later. This capacity to look to the future, a birthright of an economically protected philanthropy, does not mean that such institutions always look beyond the present. Indeed, while such foundations and trusts should be looking fifty years ahead, it is rare to find one that is only ten years behind its times.

As director for arts at the Rockefeller Foundation in New York, I was fortunate, therefore, to have the advice of Nam June Paik, first as a grantee and later as a consultant to the foundation. Nam June Paik’s first written report to the foundation, written in February 1968, three months into a residency with the State University of New York at Stony Brook, showed me that this musician who had become a pioneer in video art

was the kind of thinker who should be advising philanthropies, if not governments. Paik's restless mind gathered information from many sources, and from its analysis, drew inferences which he converted to practical and frequently inexpensive recommendations. The Stony Brook paper of 1968 anticipates much of what was to become routine thinking about the educational, instructional, and artistic usages of electronic media twenty-three years later. Reading it today, its observations and urgings have a familiar, even comfortable, ring. But if one could transport oneself backward to 1968 and reassume the mental concepts that were prevalent then, one would realize that Paik was thinking and writing decades ahead of most. We cannot imagine the impact Beethoven's C Major Symphony had on its first listeners, their shock at hearing a dominant chord begin the piece and then resolve in a deceptive cadence. That is a little like rereading Paik now after the revolutions in technology and their usages have become familiar to us.

Because the Stony Brook paper entitled "Expanded Education for the Paper-Less Society" dealt with instructional uses of television, it concentrated on how television and video might be used to create a "Global University" to share information on esoteric culturally specific subjects (Gagaku orchestras, African dance, Israeli liturgical study), and obvious but overlooked subject matter such as preserving the speaking images of great writers, philosophers, and thinkers, many of whom, alas, are now lost to us. Paik wrote of aiding the comprehension of complex music through visual and audio presentations of music from Medieval periods through serial and electronic music.

Writing at the height of the avant-garde movement of the 1960s, Paik was himself a leader of that movement. This is clear in retrospect to most, but was not clear then. Persons such as myself were alone in seeking out and valuing the advice of artists and of avant-gardist artists like Paik. I confess that I could not see, as he did in 1968, the clear implications of that technology. I could not supply examples to illustrate his statements. For example, he wrote, "The younger generation is increasingly visually included with more desire for the total and instant perception. How would classic music, including the new serious music, fare in the age of *electronic video recording*?" This, written sometime before MTV, before the routine recording on video of concerts, opera, and ballet,

not to say contemporary work in the United States.

For some fifteen years following 1968, Paik continued to furnish me and therefore the Rockefeller Foundation with his practical visionary ideas. I combine the words *practical* and *visionary* quite consciously to emphasize the link that philanthropies must make to fulfill their own mandates. Many of those ideas, alas, languished on the paper he wrote them on due to competing interests at the Rockefeller Foundation, but others found fulfillment. There are video departments in major museums in the United States because of Paik's advice to me. There are programs of support to video artists because of Paik's vision and encouragement. There is an international public television screening conference (INPUT) because of Paik's insistence on international thinking and exchange. The central, underlying theme in his Stony Brook paper, however, has not and perhaps could not be acted upon. It was the conviction that the artist is central to any society and should play a far more active role in developing communications and education in American society. The adoption of that idea, so recently reinforced in Eastern Europe by the presence of artists in the political changes that have swept that portion of the globe, is still resisted in the United States.

When I retired from the Rockefeller Foundation in 1986, the *New York Times* flatteringly wrote of me that I was "arguably the most innovative" foundation officer in America. The *Times* was actually praising Nam June Paik, whose advice to the Foundation had been so prescient and practical and whose concern for the world and others had found expression in so many programs underwritten by that Foundation. He enabled it, and me, to look ahead.

Howard Klein, consultant to the arts, was music critic of the New York Times and, until 1986, Director of Arts at the Rockefeller Foundation, New York.

*In Memoriam George Maciunas
Concert by Joseph Beuys and Nam June Paik,
Düsseldorf, 1978 (Photos, René Block)*

*In Memoriam George Maciunas
Poster, Düsseldorf, 1978*

Nam June Paik

2 x Mini-Giants*

The East European revolution produced a playwright-president, Vaclav Havel, in Czechoslovakia, but few people know that it also produced a Fluxus president: Vytautas Landsbergis, the president of Lithuania. During the spring of 1990, the image of this bespectacled and stoop-shouldered "music professor" paraded across the TV news every day. He successfully defied the blockade of Soviet power and the "benevolent" advice of the Western press to go slow lest he destroy the superpower summit. When Gorbachev received the Nobel Prize, Landsbergis sent him a congratulatory telegram: "Your Majesty..."

This audacious style of David-and-Goliath situation strongly reminded me of Landsbergis's best friend, George Maciunas, founder of the "small" Fluxus Movement and the "enormous" SoHo glitz.

Landsbergis and Maciunas were both the sons of well-to-do architects, and were best friends at a grade school in Kaunas, Lithuania, in the last peaceful days of prewar Europe. The Soviet-German occupation/war/retreat with the German army/hunger/the displaced persons' camps/his father's enigmatic death (suicide?)/the vanity of New York/capitalism's "contradictions"—all these horrendous things made George Maciunas a heavy asthmatic, a fanatical do-goodist, an ego-centrist, and a part-time paranoid. At the beginning of the sixties, as a naive Marxist, Maciunas contacted the old friend he had left in Lithuania, who was, alas, a burning anti-Marxist. In response, in a letter of December 5, 1965, Landsbergis sent Maciunas some subversive performance ideas:

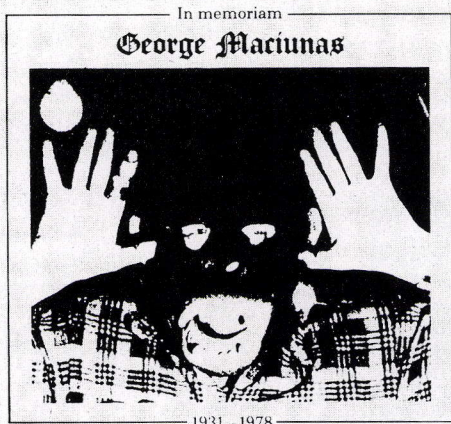
A Sewer's Hymn

"The performer walks on stage, pulls out from a bag a dozen licey rats and throws them at the public!/this would be work for people, animals and the public./ Do not take this as a joke, these are chance ideas which could, in thousands, come to a head, in *Fluxus spirit*."

Landsbergis, although still confined in Soviet Lithuania, participated three times in the Fluxus mail-art event organized by Mieko Shiomi from Osaka, Japan. Two examples from 1966 are:

Spatial Poem No. 3

"Falling Event. Various things were let fall: Vytautas Landsbergis caught a pike



KLAVIERDUETT
Joseph Beuys & Nam June Paik

Fluxus-Soirée der Galerie René Block in der
**Aula der Staatlichen Kunstakademie
 Düsseldorf**

Freitag, 7. Juli 1978, 20 Uhr

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at the lake of Aisetas, cleaned its entrails, and threw them into a pit toward the center of the earth. Then he cut the pike into pieces and let them fall onto a frying pan.”

Lithuania, July 31, 1966

Spatial Poem No. 5

“Open Event. People opened. Vytautas Landsbergis. A day after my return from the country to my flat in Vilnius, I opened the lid of my piano and hit the keyboard of F sharp. When the sound died down completely, I went to my study to continue on some unfinished work.”

Vilnius, 1 P. M., July 23, 1972

In 1964, Maciunas picketed Karlheinz Stockhausen’s music-play *Originale*, played by myself and other Fluxus members on Fifty-seventh Street. He accused us (or me in particular?) of being “social climbers” and Stockhausen of being a “racist” and a “cultural imperialist” because the latter did not have a high regard for jazz: the black people’s invention. (Maciunas even let the French Fluxus member Ben Vautier picket John Cage and Merce Cunningham in Nice for a similar reason in 1965.)

However, we (Allan Kaprow, Dick Higgins, Jackson MacLow, Charlotte Moorman, Ayo, and myself) continued the *Originale* performance inside Judson Hall on Fifty-seventh Street.

Feeling betrayed by his comrades, Maciunas, the chairman of Fluxus, declared Fluxus dead and plunged himself into the SoHo housing project. He won a landmark decision to convert a light-manufacturing loft building into an artist studio residence. He endowed the venerable Fluxus name on the first artist co-op in SoHo, at 80 Wooster Street. The similar conversion of twenty-seven buildings followed at no profit to him, igniting the SoHo real estate boom. In 1978, Maciunas finished his life at forty-seven in poverty, betrayed by his tenants, co-op members, and real estate interests.

That same year, Joseph Beuys and I performed a farewell sonata for him at the Düsseldorf-Kunstakademie. Soon a quiet renaissance of Fluxus began, and behind the Iron Curtain, the slow renaissance of Lithuania was growing, led by the stubborn ex-Fluxus man Vytautas Landsbergis.

Recently the correspondence of these two giants from a minination was printed in the Lithuanian music magazine *The Young Music*. When he was dying, in 1978, Maciunas entrusted his part of the correspondence to Jonas Mekas, and

President Landsbergis kept his half for the past quarter century in the long winters of resistance.

* From *Artforum*, New York, March 1991.

Yoshiaki Tono

Video Fish

I visited Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris after an interval of two years. Since the time of its opening, when it was teasingly labeled as a cultural supermarket, twenty thousand people a day have visited this enormous contemporary art center. After seeing the *Paris-Moscou 1900–1930* exhibition, I went down to the main floor of the museum. My legs were tired after too much walking.

Everyone seemed to be feeling the same. No seats were available. There was a video screening room, so I went in, sat on the floor with my legs stretched out, and started watching the show. It was a video installation consisting of five tropical fish tanks, each placed in front of an individual TV monitor. It was designed so that you viewed the five video monitors through fish and water.

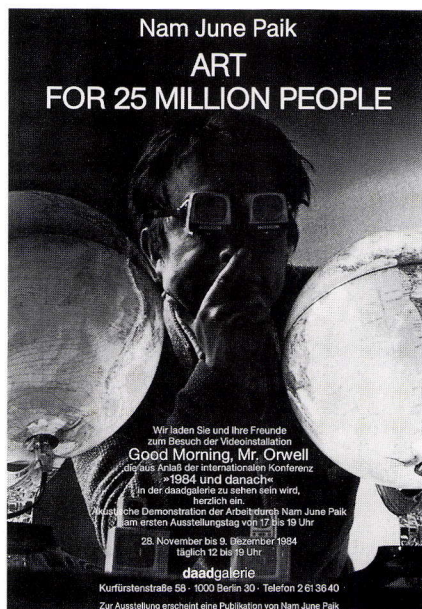
The video screens showed synthesizer-processed images of tropical fish, dancing performers, and street scenes with dizzy rapidity. It was titled *Video Fish*. I had never watched video art this thoroughly before. Luckily, it’s because my legs were tired that I saw this work. The video was made by Nam June Paik, a Korean-American artist. In comparison to the many complicated and banally “conceptual” video works, his video installation, seen through tropical fish tanks, conveyed a strong sense of humor in the fusion of images and material objects.

Pontus Hulten, the director of the museum, jokingly told me that after acquiring the piece, the tropical fish immediately died, and since adding the fish was such a painstaking job, they were now looking for stronger fish. I was reminded of a bizarre story in a McLuhan book that reported a mouse biting a cat after being exposed to a TV screen for a week. I wouldn’t be surprised if Paik’s video fish, affected by the high-tech media, metamorphosed into piranha.

Text translated from the Japanese by Yuzo Yakuramoto.

Yoshiaki Tono is a prominent Japanese art critic.

**Invitation to Art for 25 Million People
DAAD Gallery, Berlin, 1984**



**Paik with *Tricolor Video*, 1982
384 color televisions on cinderblocks in the entrance hall of the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (Photo, Yan Morvan)**



Christine van Assche
From 1984 to 1988*

By 1990, two hundred television broadcasting and telecommunications satellites will have been launched into space.

Nam June Paik, however, was not to wait for this population explosion in space before putting an intercontinental artistic program into orbit. No longer satisfied with the mere television transmission of his video works—something so dear to the hearts of video artists—he sought the largest possible international viewing audience: San Francisco, New York, Paris, Cologne, Seoul.

George Orwell's *1984* provided inspiration for Paik to launch electronic images conceived in, and remotely controlled from, Paris. In media history, the event will count as the first program ever created by an artist and transmitted simultaneously in the United States, Europe, and Korea. History will also remember the phenomenon of one man acting as artist, producer, and director.

As no American backer could be found to cover the risks of this production of Hollywood-like proportions, Nam

June Paik appealed to artists who had agreed to take part in the venture—Joseph Beuys, John Cage, and Allen Ginsberg—to help him tie up the American side of the finances. They sponsored their support by the sale of works specially created for the occasion. Nam June Paik committed his own income from two years of museum and gallery exhibitions to the project.

Channel 13, in the difficult role of associate producer for the production in the United States, opened its transmission to the PBS network. The French channel FR3 took charge of the French production, with the help of the Centre Georges Pompidou. WDR, with its previous experience of putting on arts programs, also made a contribution.

Three different versions of the same program, each bearing the marks of its national producer's style, were aired on January 1, 1984. Korean television transmitted the American version direct from the United States.

Nam June Paik's futurist objective was to intermingle, mix, knead together two continents, two languages, two artistic and social cultures, and all in live transmission.

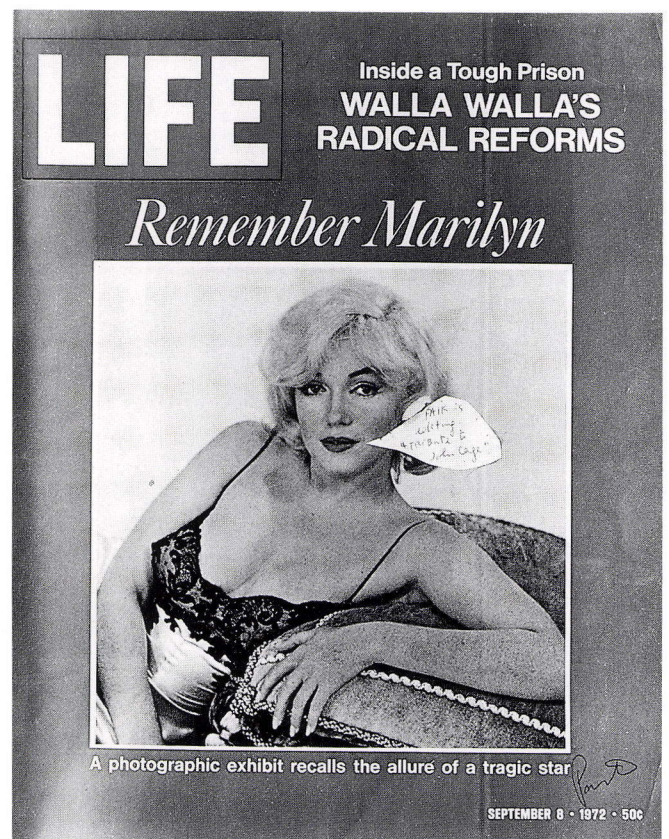
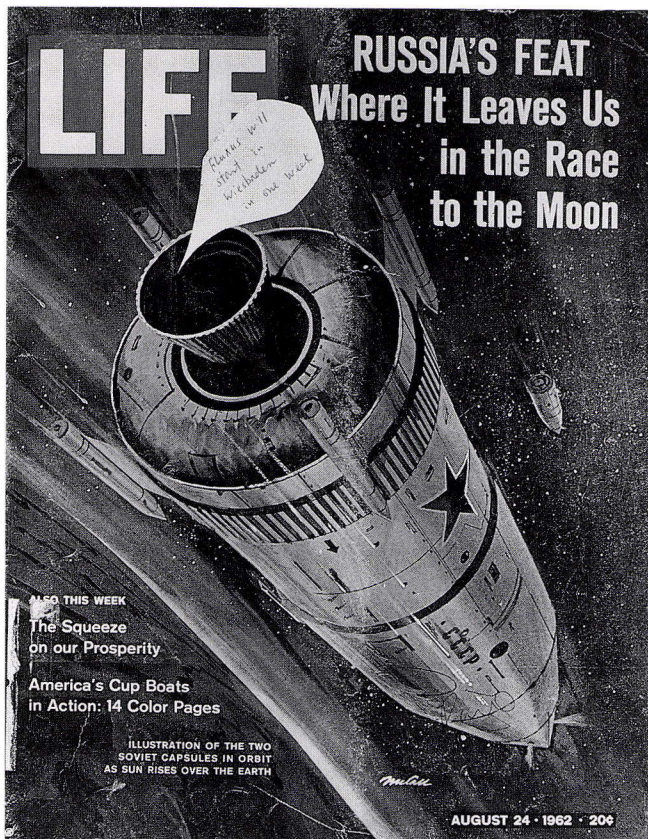
Live television, usually reserved on

our screens for sporting and political events, triumphed on this January day, and, with its built-in risk of the unexpected, went way beyond the scenario written and rewritten like a musical score by Nam June Paik.

The next stage: 1988, the Olympic Games in Seoul.

* From *Nam June Paik, Satellite and Art*, DAAD Galerie, Berlin, 1984. Original text in French.

Christine van Assche is Curator of the Video Department, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.



Nam June Paik

The Paint Box*

It was about a year ago when I paid a visit to Richard Hamilton. Hamilton lives in a place called Reading, about an hour from London, in a broad pastoral region. His residence is an old farmhouse. The land next to his is owned by the son of the oil baron Paul Getty.

I happen to be a newspaper addict, and when I'm at Hamilton's place, I read the newspapers as usual. Hamilton, who is a dedicated ecologist, tells me he doesn't read newspapers because they waste paper, but only watches TV. He asks me if I know what a paint box is.

"Of course I know what it is," I answer. "Hockney uses it, too." Then Hamilton tells me that nearby is a factory of the Quantel Company, which manufactures the paint box. The paint box is a machine that anyone who deals in video production is familiar with. It is a digital effector which performs such tasks as splitting the screen and adding color. Quantel is one of the largest manufacturers of the paint box.

Hamilton continues.

"If the third world war broke out,

those of us here would probably be killed first, for Reading is the locale of one of the major missile bases in Europe. The Quantel factory is providing parts to the missile base."

When I heard this, I felt that a doubt I had had for many years was being dispelled. Entering the computer studio at midnight and handling the machines in the air-conditioned chamber, I had often been struck by a feeling as if I were operating radar in the underground control room of a missile base.

Come to think of it, it's not as if a huge sum of money had been spent to develop the paint box, the demand for which is limited. Take the CCD, which is being advertised everywhere today—wasn't it originally developed by the American Army during the Vietnam War to hunt the Vietcong at night?

If I were a "clean leftist," I would have to say, "I shall no longer use the paint box." Because I am a video artist, I cannot accomplish my art without the paint box. Not only art would be impossible. Without the paint box, even baseball games could not be broadcast.

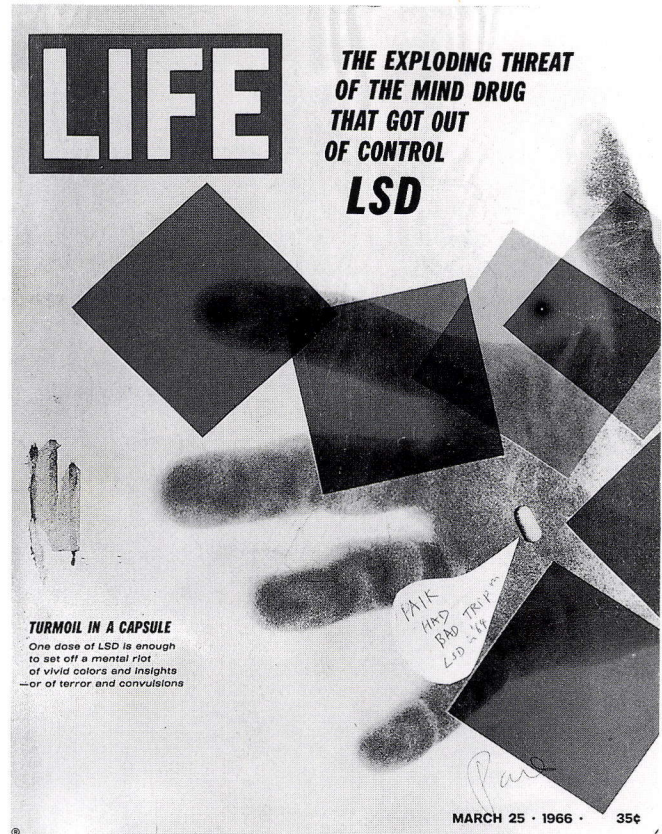
At that moment, I sensed I had found the limit of the idea, "Human use of technology." But every human endeavor

has its "Karma." There's no way around it.

* From *Simulation*, Yoshitaka Mohri, ed., I & S Corporation, Tokyo, 1988.

My Life, 1974

A few examples of the 44 *Life* magazine covers given "balloon dialogue" by Paik
Private collection, Berlin



Arata Isozaki

A Conversation with Nam June Paik*

Isozaki: The word *performance* is now all the vogue in Japan. Any act that does not proceed according to a predetermined scenario is called, in Englishized Japanese, *performance art*—even overt entertainment. Your work, Mr. Paik, has always had something to do with performance from the time of your debut—even when you were “merely” a composer. Now your works are becoming crystallized around the core and concept of video. Could you speak about the essence of performance art or the “liveness” and uniqueness of video?

Paik: Well, you are the true master, sir. Architecture exists for eternity, but music just flows; it is temporary and temporal. We have different jobs to do.

I: Well, our jobs are different. Certainly architecture can exist permanently and eternally, but in reality, it is not always so. Even if a building is made out of hard cement, if you don’t like it tomorrow, you can tear it down. In contrast, even if there is a very old, decaying wooden house, if everybody loves it, it will be preserved for many hundreds of years.

P: In other words, architecture itself may be stiff and immobile, yet you architects try to construct a space that gives a feeling of sexiness, uniqueness, and “virginity”—those are your eternal objectives.

I: Yes.

P: Why is performance art at its peak now? It is because we are in the midst of the yuppie boom of the eighties. After the peace and affluence that had lasted forty or fifty years, we are awakened to the instinct of “ex-tasis,” that is, going away from everydayness toward a yearning for transcendence. As Kierkegaard said: Daily peaceful life is beautiful, but we want to go outside of it. Therefore, we look for the hero or the outlaw artist. However, Hitler and real war is too much to take; let’s stay inside the circle of harmlessness. Therefore, today’s performance art is such a limit-conscious ex-tasis; let’s not *really* destroy the glitz world, yet let’s criticize our daily life and grab back at our instinctive creativity... let’s get out of everydayness temporarily, yet tomorrow—

I: Go back to work in the everyday world.

P: Yes, at nine in the morning, go to the office at Sony or Hitachi—and stay

there until five o’clock (ha, ha, ha).

I: That means performance art does not seek the absolute to the bitter end. But even if it’s only temporary, when you momentarily leave the daily banality and come back to it again, you still positively affect our world by disturbing the average flow of our daily common banality.

P: For example, when I do a videotaped “canned” TV show, people don’t watch it too much, even if it is flawless and well done. Because that is like reading books. Yet, when I do a live satellite show, people watch it, even though I make mistakes. Why? Because of the uniqueness, spontaneity, the—“virginity.” You are born only once. You die only once. The most important things happen only once. A human being has an essential yearning or angst for the non-repeatable. The reason I became well-known through destructive art was also because of this nonrepeatability. Once you break an expensive piano, it cannot be put back together. Once you throw water on the ground, you cannot scoop it back up. From this fear and yearning born of the fragility of life, our philosophy of “the eternal return” emerges.

I: The Europeans’ concept of art looks for the eternal and constant and they try to

stabilize and materialize it as a monument and show it as something unchangeable. The European concept of architecture also demonstrates this hypothesis and premise. Yet in Asia and Japan we don't believe in that. One shape is not constant or eternal. Rather—things vanish all the time. Since we think that everything changes anyway, we conceive of a masterpiece in response to and in accordance with this condition of constant change. Let's think about the Ise Shrine¹—the major Shinto building of Japan. We rebuild it every twenty years —the exact same shape is rebuilt every twenty years.

P: Well—like a Xerox copy.

I: Yes: It is *our* response, our attitude to the eternal. We don't believe in *things*, we believe in a way of thinking, a social system that supports those things. That is different from the case in Europe. Now go back to video—video has a mechanism in which it loses the eternal each second, yet regains the eternal in the next second.

P: Yes, yes.

I: In this sense, Mr. Paik, since you are an Asian, you may have intuitively discovered that side of video—the fragility or transitory quality of this new medium.

* From Arata Isozaki, *The Politics of Architecture: To Create, While Destroying. What Is the Art of the Video Age?*, Tokyo, Iwanamishoten, 1989, pp. 238–243. Excerpts translated from Japanese by Yuzo Yakuramoto; original edit by Alan Marlis.

NOTE

1 A double temple (*Naik*, inner shrine, *Geku*, outer shrine) popular for pilgrimages, in Ise Province. The simple wood construction, renewed every twenty years, is typical of old-style Japanese building.



Akira Asada

Video: Nam June Paik*

Phonetic signs, such as the alphabet, have necessarily to be set out linearly, whereas ideographic signs, such as Chinese characters, can be much more freely juxtaposed or stacked together. We might say that they can be disposed among images in two- or three-dimensional space. We see this in traditional Chinese, Korean, and Japanese art. And I wonder whether this difference is relevant to an understanding of the Korean video artist's work. In any case, in Nam June Paik's work, the paradigmatic and multidimensional accumulation of signs and images far outweighs syntagmatic and linear integration. He piles up signs and images, takes accumulation to its most extreme point, and when it has reached a kaleidoscopic climax, paradoxically, one becomes aware of a kind of void—a void full of images or the silence full of sounds. And I think this experience is the very kernel of Nam June Paik's art.

* From the French transcription of a statement on video by Professor Asada.

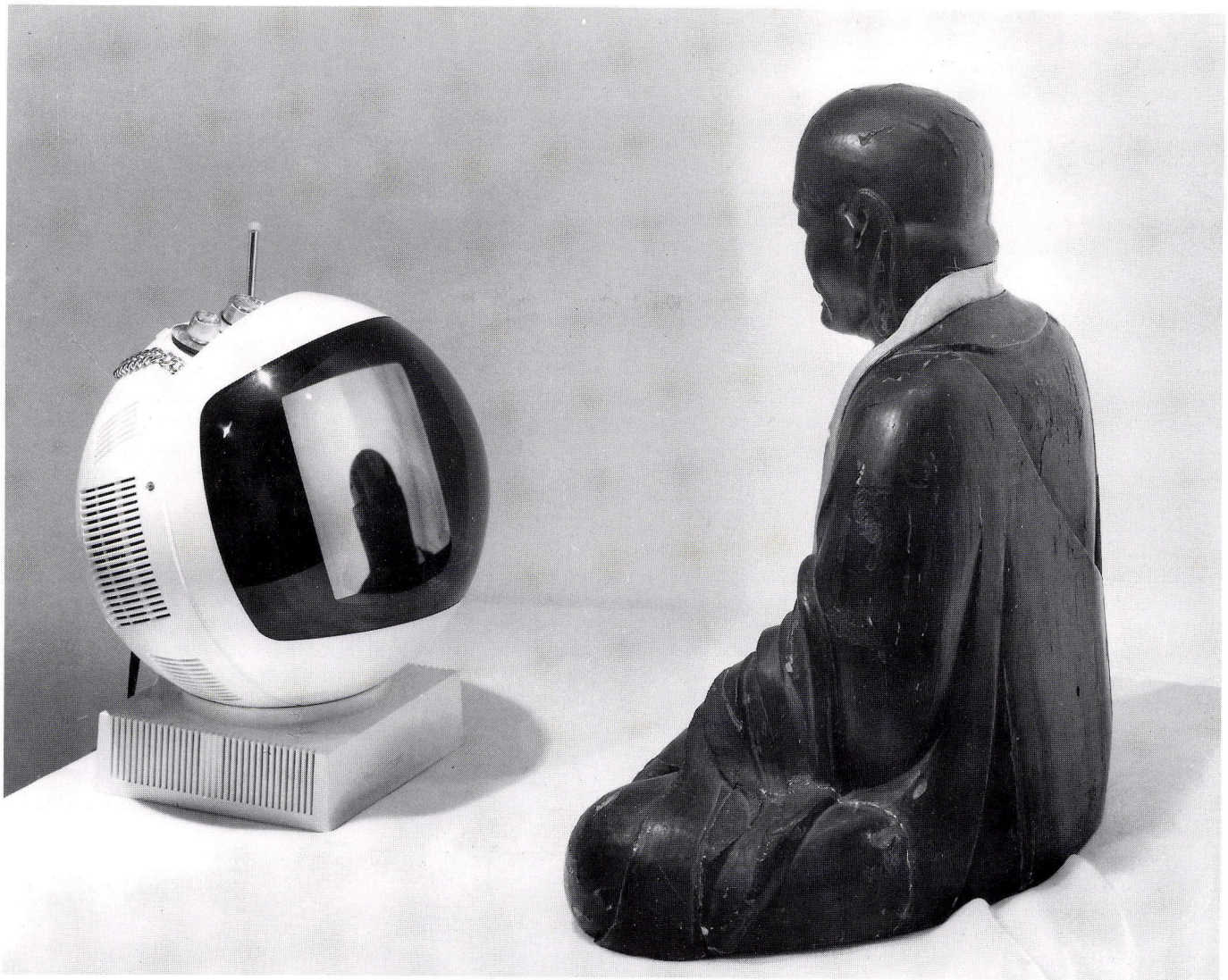
Professor Akira Asada is described by Paik as the "Number-One Brain in Japan in semiotics."

Prepared Scroll, 1974

Japanese scroll with photo of Charlotte Moorman wearing *TV Bra for Living Sculpture* 68x14"
Barbara and Peter Moore Collection

TV Buddha, 1974

Closed-circuit installation with wooden Buddha, television, and video camera
(Photo, Bruce C. Jones)
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam



O-ryong Lee

The Art of Meta-Communication: A Conversation Between Nam June Paik and O-ryong Lee*

Paik: (as he studies a hanging wall scroll of folk painting): Looks like a painting of the scholar's "four precious things"—paper, writing brush, ink stick, and grinding stone—and the perspective is very peculiar.

Lee: When Europeans see through an object, they look at it from outside the object—from an outside viewpoint—and as a result, the vanishing point is formed at a distance far beyond the viewer, where the parallel lines recede farther. On the other hand, because we Asians look at an object from the inside toward the outside, the perspective of a reverse triangle results. To put it another way, Westerners look at the center from the periphery of a circle, while Easterners

look at the periphery from the center of a circle. Therefore, our vision of the field is wider, and thus, the reverse triangle perspective is naturally formed.

P: Like a folding fan.

L: It is not only perspective that differs. Europeans and Asians have different ways of appreciating a picture. In the case of our twelve-panel folding screen, each panel is a complete painting, but when you put them side by side obliquely—that is, with the panels not opened out fully—the viewer's vantage point becomes distorted. We need to view the screen as a whole, not panel by panel, for it to be appreciated as an overall scene. Each of your television sets can be compared with one of the folding screen's panels, and your entire installation with the twelve-panel folding screen.

P: That's a very interesting point—that when you look at a folding screen, you don't fix on one part, but see the whole spread of the painting, not from front but

from an oblique angle. And it's also true that when you look at each of my TV sets separately, there's hardly any meaning there, either.

L: Some time ago, I saw a video installation of yours with fish swimming, seen on TV sets placed hanging from or near a high ceiling. It may be an unusual sight from a European viewpoint, to see fish swimming in the air, but it's a very traditional concept to those of us who are used to seeing fish dangling from wind chimes hung at the corner of eaves, or flying fish kites made by the Japanese....

P: Well, you got ahead of me! A few days ago, I watched on KBS-TV a program called *Koreans in the Soviet Union*. Korean-American writer Richard Kim was the commentator. I don't know how many times I wept watching that show! It was as if I were looking back at Koreans of the twenties and thirties. I could find our ancient customs and traditions in the Soviet Union rather than in Korea. It was

like looking in on the traditional Japan of the 1920s and 1930s in Los Angeles, to which a mass of Japanese immigrated. The reason why the Koreans in the Soviet Union and China are living with greater ease and confidence than those in Europe and the Americas is that we are descendants of a horse-riding tribe of a Ural-Altaic race. The Crimean Tartars who rescued Joseph Beuys from the brink of death are living at the other end of the earth, but they are much like Koreans.

L: Listening to your theories on the origins of Koreans as a horseback-riding tribe, I also think we have to look for our ethnic origins there. Watching the same program, I thought that it was not they who were immigrants from the Korean peninsula, but we who moved to this peninsula from there. I felt like looking at our ancient history from their features. It seems that we have only defined Korea in terms of South Korea. From a cultural perspective, I think we have to broaden the whole gamut of our understanding of Korea in a much more comprehensive manner....

P: My video artwork, which is to be relayed worldwide via satellite on September 11, 1988, is entitled *Wrap Around the World*, or *Wrap the World Around*. Literally, softly wrapping the five oceans and six continents in a *bajagi*—a “wrapping cloth.” An Orientalist, Professor Blythe, once wrote an article on Kosan Yun Sondo.¹ He said a *bajagi* can wrap one book when there is only one, ten books when there are ten, and when it rains, it is a substitute for an umbrella. It’s so versatile—there are infinite variations of usage.

L: A world wrapped in one! How nice it would be if we could reconcile ourselves with one another and achieve a unity of hearts inside a single piece of wrapping cloth—shed the problems of binary world, black-and-white logic! The series I am currently writing for *Chuokoron*² is also on the theme of “wrapping” culture. It is an attempt of postmodernism to cover the established aesthetics in a wrapping cloth.

P: This is a very fascinating form of art—that you can put everything and anything into a wrapping cloth without limit and without frame. The Australian film director Nicholas Ray, who catapulted the unknown James Dean into stardom in *Rebel Without a Cause*, dreamed of making a frameless film using 8mm, 16mm, and videotape simultaneously and compositely, but he died without realizing his dream. Perhaps it’s everyone’s dream to make a frameless

film. As for me, I would like to destroy the TV frame.

L: Your works of art are inseparable from communication. Some time ago, I read your interesting article on the horse, published in a foreign magazine. You wrote that the horse had been the fastest means of communication; that whenever a new means of communication appeared on the horizon (the invention of paper, printing, telephone, television), human civilization developed in leaps and bounds—and from the beginning, art was the communication of information. That’s why I pin so much hope on your video art. It’s like a “nongravity art” which can be communicated via videotape or electric current—instead of paintings, which are so difficult to transport.

What attracted my attention to your work is that you emphasize media as conveying information rather than media as a means of communication, per se. I would like to name your world of art “The Art of Meta-Communication.” Most viewers take the performance of the screen as the content of your work, setting aside the TV set. They don’t always consider the television screen as an instrument for showing something. In other words, they regard the TV set as something—how shall I put it?—nonexpressive.

But from the meta-communication point of view, the television enacts itself by communicating the fact that “I’m a TV set. I’m not a stereo player, but a TV set.” Usually, we don’t acknowledge the presence of the TV set itself; we only do meta-communication with it when it’s out of order. If the TV set is something else, we don’t need to bring meta-communication into the picture. But since the TV set itself is expressing something, we are more often than not absorbed into it. So long as we do not go into meta-communication, the TV set cannot become an expression. This, I think, is the essence of Nam June Paik’s art.

Here, I’m reminded of two stories you once recounted. On a certain Invention Day,³ students were given the homework assignment of fabricating something. One student arrived emptyhanded. Asked why, he blurted out that since everybody had already invented all there was, there was nothing more to create. Everyone laughed at him. Such a person would never understand avant-garde art. But you, as a student in the same class, commuting to and from school, knew that if one ventures into an alley not frequented, there will be much more to see and enjoy. Therefore, you always took the back alleys.

I think I can see your view of art in your opinion that the tautological approach of doing review exercises on Tanwon Kim Hongdo and Hyewon Shin Yunbok,⁴ or memorizing passages from Shakespeare, will never be the path to finding one’s own creativity—and that your solitary figure will always go in search of untrodden roads.

P: I thank you very much.

* From a catalogue of the Hyundai Gallery, Seoul, 1989. Translated from Korean by Syeunggil Paik.

O-ryong Lee, a well-known critic, is former Minister of Culture of the Republic of Korea.

NOTES

- 1 Korean poet of the seventeenth century.
- 2 Japanese liberal monthly.
- 3 Korean schools of the 1940s dedicated certain study days to particular themes: “Invention Day” (creativity), “Green Day” (trees), “National Day” (ancestors), etc.
- 4 Korean painters of the eighteenth century.

Barbara London

His Paintbrush Is Consumer Electronics

World-renowned as a visionary artist, multimedia ambassador, and enterprising sage, Nam June Paik has spent a peripatetic lifetime straddling parts of Asia, Europe, and the United States. His enormous curiosity seems to have been stimulated by a bourgeois upbringing in Korea, where he survived several wars, and a fugitive education that included philosophy as well as classical and avant-garde music. An avid reader, his inspiration has come as much from advances in the sciences and economics as from the arts. Very approachable with a warm smile and a twinkle in his eye, he looks somewhat like an absent-minded professor wrapped up in woollens for protection from the cold.

Paik became involved with Performance Art while a student in Germany during the early 1960s. He interacted with such composers as John Cage and the wry, polemic Fluxus artists, whose primary intent was to break down the barriers between art and its audience. After exhibiting a series of sculptures made out of manipulated television sets, with encouragement from artists like George Maciunas, Paik came to New York in 1964. Arriving penniless but with plenty of gumption, he managed to get his feet on the ground, and within two years, had one of the first portable video

cameras in Manhattan. One of his earliest videotapes was *Mayor Lindsay: Three Early Studies in CV-Tape*, in which he recorded a television press conference of then New York City mayor, John Lindsay. In this video, Paik adapted the style of repeating a short fragment. This form of “kamikaze” editing soon became part of his signature style.

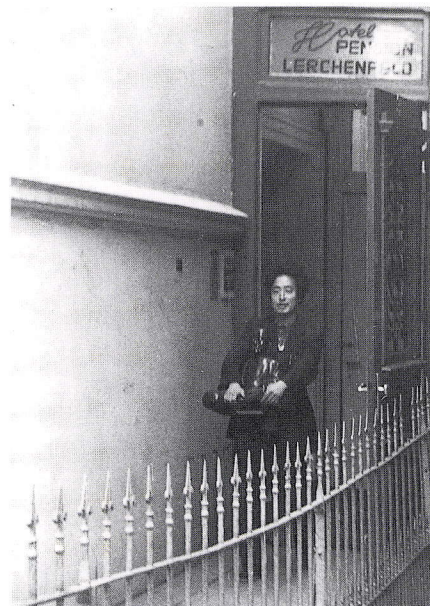
As a video pioneer, Paik’s early video portraits revealed a deep understanding of the diverse applications of the medium. His early tapes of famous media figures paralleled Andy Warhol’s concurrent silkscreen paintings of such pop stars as Marilyn Monroe. For more than twenty-five years, Nam June Paik’s paintbrush has been consumer electronics: the video camera, TV set, and computer, which now are such integral aspects of our everyday landscape. Broadcast internationally, his videotapes are known as widely as his video sculptures and installations.

As the technologies change, Nam June continues looking for new challenges. He is committed to working in that ambiguous middle ground between mass communication and art, an area he says is like an apple seed. Both his theme and his dream become our enlightenment.

Barbara London is Assistant Curator, Video, Department of Film, Museum of Modern Art, New York. The museum has one of the largest archival collections of videotape in the world.



Nam June Paik with Buddha, Hamburg, 1977



Dorine Mignot

A Letter*

Dear Nam June,

Sitting in front of my personal computer and thinking about the friendly request to write something about you—not in the framework of art history, but in a more personal way—many memories start to hover in my mind.

The TV-time issue for your exhibition in 1979

our midnight telephone conversations about this question

your astonishment at the wonderful way it worked out

the setting up of your piece for *The Luminous Image* show

the very small room you chose as a “mas-

ter under his pupils”
your way of walking in the museum
your favorite Dutch restaurant around the corner
(when we lost you, we could find you there)
your liberating laugh in the middle of a lot of tension in setting up all those new installations
Your beautiful mixture of matter-of-factness and invulnerability for earthly matters
Your statement about the seducing power of music
(for example, the victory of pop music in Moscow) never left my mind after the first time I heard it
music as an irrepressible intruder
music as the first messenger
music as the culture-binder
the culture issue
the time issue
Since I had the good luck to meet with you, I have been intrigued by your amalgam of cultures
since then, an exhibition with this amalgam of cultures is a theme that never left me
we will make it
But showing this Polaroid photo tells best how much you are part of my daily working life.

Dorine Mignot

2/7/1991

* *Dorine Mignot is Curator of Video, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.*

Paul-Emmanuel Odin

**Stasis and Ecstasy:
On Paik the Invincible**

Some of Paik's installations have an ever-present duality. On the one hand, he gives the statues he constructs the physical power of things in contact with the earth—a great stasis. On the other, he glorifies in them the musical light and the perpetual transformations of the visible world. This is what one feels in front of his monuments—the *Madeleine Disco*, the *Seoul Tower*—and his robots: a fabulous interweaving of the visual and the tangible. Stasis and ecstasy. The artist's frenzy brings these two elements to their climax, a great burst of laughter that turns everything upside down.

What does this great burst of laughter overturn? The acquisitive society and the telecommunications society of which television is the symbol. And in his works the symbol is as unwieldy as what it represents. Paik's piling up of television sets and radios is, in fact, an expression of a sense of humor that is very literal, very down-to-earth, and very violent; because the megalomaniac proliferation of sets in Paik's installations reenacts the tragic process of televisual saturation. In them, however, it is not spirit or eyes that are stuffed with images, but space that is stuffed with mountains of television sets! So a Paik exhibition is always a turning upside down of reality. But the immovable rock of Earth is also celebrated. Megalomania is for Paik a way of achieving a great stasis. It is as if, in his installations, he takes the world in his hand—which is much better than taking possession of it by satellite (as in 1984 with *Good Morning, Mr. Orwell*).

Paik's genius, however, is always to maintain a paradoxical position: What he constructs so massively—an excessively present reality—is, and remains at all times, a simulacrum. Everything is tele-something. But the substitution of real objects—of all objects, from *TV Glasses* to *TV Penis* via *Video Fish*—by tele-objects is more than a critical gesture that takes the endless flow of television images to its inevitable conclusion, lack of attention and blindness. Paik's simulacra are real and force us to move round them, unlike the simulacrum of the television picture. Against the single televisual image, Paik has a number of weapons: the axe of plurality, the hammer of the tangible, and the music of the visual, which reaches its highest point in colored light.

The plurality is the result of the repeti-

tion of images, which Paik presents in sequences that pass from one to another and play with a variety of combinations. Each image is a repetition of another image; each image is a simulacrum from which Paik draws out variations, by embedding it in deep matrices (*V-Matrix*).

So the multimonitor installation is an organism, an accumulation in which a mystery reverberates. It is the power of the Immutable, which issues also from the statuesque immobility of Paik's robots. The Immutable stirs and groans at the heart of each of Paik's televisions, the tangible world, angry at the threat posed by the Unreal. As the speed at which images and information are transmitted increases, Unreality spreads and leads to blank death. Blank death at the speed barrier, which is a barrier of neutralizing light. There is something terrifying about the possibilities of telecommunication, which replaces the real world with a universe of virtual reality. But in Paik there is always a playful and anarchic will that triumphs over the inertia of the virtual.

So the transmutations of the physical world may be celebrated in images that no longer ask to be seen—there are too many of them!—but to be heard. A luminous ecstasy of magical flickering surrounds the installations. Out of the Immutable issues the unceasing; the musical flow overcomes the endless flow of information.

Paik's multimonitor installations are thus simulacra, the reality of which muffles the tragic drama of the unreal world of telecommunications. Living simulacra rise from the burst of laughter. It needed Paik's Dadaist spirit to both embrace and embarrass the deadly world of the new communication technologies. Domatics, robotics, and telecommunications—in replacing real actions, movements, and objects by a virtual reality—could well destroy the physical and mobile dimensions of reality, and lead us to a paralysis of both body and mind. To give up bodily movement could lead to a loss of the bodily senses, and even of the idea of movement and the corporeal. And then, no doubt, the mind would come to a standstill, no longer active or feeling. Fortunately, the mystery of Paik and his totems is there, always ready to unleash around him an almighty volcano of life.

Paul-Emmanuel Odin is a freelance critic/author who lives in Paris.



Nam June Paik with Johannes Stüttgen at the
Free International University, Düsseldorf, 1986



Nam June Paik, 1989
(Photo, Eric Kroll)

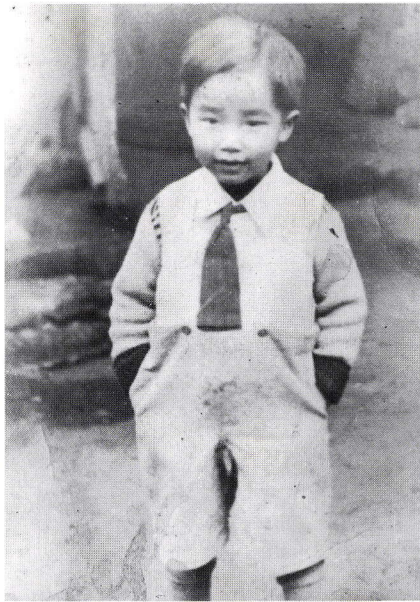
Biographical Notes

Nam June Paik was born on July 20, 1932, in Seoul, Korea, the fifth and youngest child in a textile merchant's family. He had his first piano and composition lesson at the age of fourteen, and at fifteen, discovered Arnold Schoenberg's music. After spending 1949 in Hong Kong, with the onset of the Korean War the Paik family left Seoul the following year, and settled in Tokyo. From 1953 to 1956, Paik studied music history, art history, and philosophy at the University of Tokyo, graduating with a dissertation on Schoenberg.

His interest in avant-garde music took him to Germany in 1956, where he studied music history under Thrasybulos Georgiades at the University of Munich, and composition under Wolfgang Fortner at the Hochschule für Musik in Freiburg. In both 1957 and 1958 he took part in the *Internationale Ferienkurse für neue Musik* in Darmstadt, and also attended classes given by Karlheinz Stockhausen, Luigi Nono, David Tudor, and John Cage. Meeting Cage marked a turning point in Paik's life.

Cologne became Paik's base for the next five years, where he worked with Stockhausen in the WDR Studio for Electronic Music. The performance of *Hommage à John Cage*—music for tapes and piano—on November 13, 1959, at J. P. Wilhelm (Galerie 22, Düsseldorf), and concerts at Mary Bauermeister's studio were the prelude to his spectacular appearances in the early sixties which, as a manifestation of neo-Dada, led into Fluxus art. In 1961, Paik presented some of his own compositions (*Simple, Zen for Head, Etude Platonique no. 3*) in connection with performances of Stockhausen's *Originale* in the Theater Am Dom in Cologne.

Also in 1961 in the context of Fluxus, he founded the University for Avant-garde Hinduism, of which he remains the sole member. After meeting Fluxus founder George Maciunas in the same year, Paik next participated in the *Neo-Dada in der Musik* concert on June 16, 1962, and contributed to Fluxus concerts in Wiesbaden, Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Paris, and Düsseldorf during 1962–63. Then visual aspects of his concert work gained significance equal to the music in his legendary one-man show *Exposition of Music—Electronic Television* at the Galerie Parnass, located in the private house of the Jährlings, a Wupper-



Nam June Paik, circa 1936



Paik family house, Seoul, 1937–1945

Paik at Kurahashi's house in Tokyo, 1951



tal couple who are both architects. In that exhibition (March 11–30, 1963), Paik presented a skull of a freshly slaughtered ox, prepared pianos in sixteen different rooms, thirteen television sets, some of them manipulated, a store mannequin in a bathtub, and numerous sound-producing objects (including *Schallplatten-schaschlik, Random Access*).

Returning to Japan a short time later, Paik joined with electronics engineer Shuya Abe to conduct experiments with electromagnets and color televisions, which laid the groundwork for *Participation TV*—active viewer assistance in creating and reshaping images and television programs. With Abe, Paik also developed a remote-controlled robot that could walk, talk, and excrete beans. *Robot K-456* made his debut in New York when Paik moved there in 1964. On August 30, Paik's *Robot Opera* was presented at the *Second Annual New York Avantgarde Festival*. The festival organizer, twenty-four-year-old cellist Charlotte Moorman, worked closely with Paik thereafter. He composed pieces that she played and they gave many concerts together regularly in the United States and Europe. These radical, unconventional appearances ended Moorman's career as a classical cellist. She became Paik's "art figure." He was now deliberately aiming to infuse his music with sexual components.

Using money from a grant, Paik bought one of the first Sony portable video recorders sold, and on that very same day, filmed Pope Paul VI's 1965 visit to New York. It was shown on that same evening at the Café à Go Go, to promote the concept of electronic television with the video recorder. This event was followed by his one-man *Electronic Art* (November 23 to December 11) at the Galeria Bonino in New York, where *Robot K-456* again performed, along with a black-and-white television monitor that screened pictures resembling various phases of the moon.

Next came *Zen for Film*, an Edition Fluxus strip of film in a plastic box designed by Maciunas. When projected on screen, it showed mainly specks of dust.

In September 1966, in the Stockholm Museum of Technology, Paik put together his first installation of several televisions combined to form a video sculpture, the *TV Cross*.

An important performance, the New York premiere of Paik's *Opera Sextro-nique*, took place on February 9, 1967. Charlotte Moorman played the second act topless, which led to the arrest of both



Women of the Paik family, circa 1931

composer and performer, with a suspended sentence given following a court appearance (see Moorman essay).

In 1968, Paik became an artist-in-residence with WGBH-TV in Boston. Also in that year at the New York Galeria Bonino *Electronic Art II* show, he used eight television monitors and an oscillograph for another *TV Cross*. The accompanying catalogue essay by Allan Kaprow described the artist as a “cultural terrorist.” When the Hahn Collection was exhibited by the Wallraf-Richartz Museum in Cologne that year, many works from the Wuppertal *Exposition of Music* were seen again.

The first video object for Charlotte Moorman was *TV Bra for Living Sculpture*, 1969. This “brassiere” made of two miniature television sets would show either an actual television program being broadcast at that moment, or through a closed-circuit set-up, the cellist playing or the spectators watching her. This work was seen for the first time with *Participation TV* in the exhibition *TV As a Creative Medium* at the Howard Wise Gallery in New York. That same year also saw Paik’s participation in the trailblazing shows *Art by Telephone* (with Moorman) at Chicago’s Museum of Contemporary Art, and *The Machine Seen at the End of Its Age* at New York’s Museum of Modern Art.

Paik and Abe invented their video synthesizer in 1970, making it possible to manipulate colors, shapes, and movement sequences on videotapes and television programs. In Cologne, Paik took part in the *Happening and Fluxus* exhibition organized by Harald Szeemann in

the Kunstverein from November 6, 1970 to January 6, 1971.

Many noteworthy events occurred in 1971. The Paik-Abe synthesizer was shown in New York at the Galeria Bonino’s *Electronic III* exhibition, where visitors were offered the chance to experiment with the equipment themselves. John Cage wrote a commentary for the show catalogue. Paik’s *Concerto for TV Cello and Video Tape* with Charlotte Moorman had its world premiere, introducing an instrument that could produce pictures as well as sounds. Paik began working with videotape using the engineering facilities of the WNET-TV/Channel 13 TV Lab, New York, where *Global Groove* was later produced in 1973. The tapes were mainly autobiographical: sequences of people important to Paik, together with excerpts from his own performances and early experiments. There is no voice-over or other narrative format to these tapes. A statement is conveyed by the relative speed of one sequence to another, and only the colors and special effects produced by the synthesizer link the diverse pictorial segments, which thereafter recur as a running theme. This technique is used in *A Tribute to John Cage*, a videotape devoted to the composer’s oeuvre.

In January 1974, the Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse, New York, mounted a retrospective entitled *Nam June Paik – Video ‘n’ Videology 1959–1973*. Then Paik created his famous and possibly

Opera Sextronique, 1967
Charlotte Moorman at the Film Maker’s
Cinematheque, New York, 1967
(Photo, Ludwig Winterhalter)





Paik with *TV Cello*, 1982
(Photo, Jacques Charlas)

most beautiful closed-circuit work, the *TV Buddha* and the *TV Garden* for *Electronic Art IV*, shown at the Galeria Bonino in New York. In *TV Buddha*, an ancient statue of the symbol of Asian/Oriental worldview sits in front of a television set and contemplates its own image. The question of original and copy, inner reflection and outward connection, looking in and looking out, is thus expressed metaphorically. *TV Garden* came next, a multimonitor installation of twenty to thirty sets planted in a tropical garden, one of his most frequently exhibited works of this genre. The televisions lie on their backs, screens facing upward, growing in a jungle of nature and culture. Paik was also represented in Cologne that year at the Kunsthalle and the Kunstverein in *Project '74*.

Two more multiscreen installations followed in 1975, taking state-of-the-art technology and nature as their dual theme: *Fish Flies on Sky* and *Video Fish*, which were shown at the Martha Jackson Gallery in New York. In *Fish Flies on Sky*, monitors dangle from the ceiling, face downward. The videotape they

screen shows tropical fish and airplanes moving in their elements, seemingly weightless. In *Video Fish*, five fish tanks are placed in front of five television monitors whose screens show videotapes of fish. The screens are actually viewed through the fish tanks. The videotape *Merce by Merce by Paik* with Merce Cunningham also dates from 1975.

The following year, the Kölnischer Kunstverein under Wulf Herzogenrath produced the first comprehensive European retrospective of the oeuvre of the Korean musician and video artist. *Nam June Paik, Werke 1946–1974* ran from November 19, 1976, to January 9, 1977. At the same time, Paik and Charlotte Moorman started work on the videotape *Guadalcanal Requiem*, which was first telecast in 1977. (One of the most devastating battles between Japan and the United States was fought on Guadalcanal in 1944, leaving traces that remain visible today.) War documentary material and interviews were used alongside performances by Moorman and Paik.

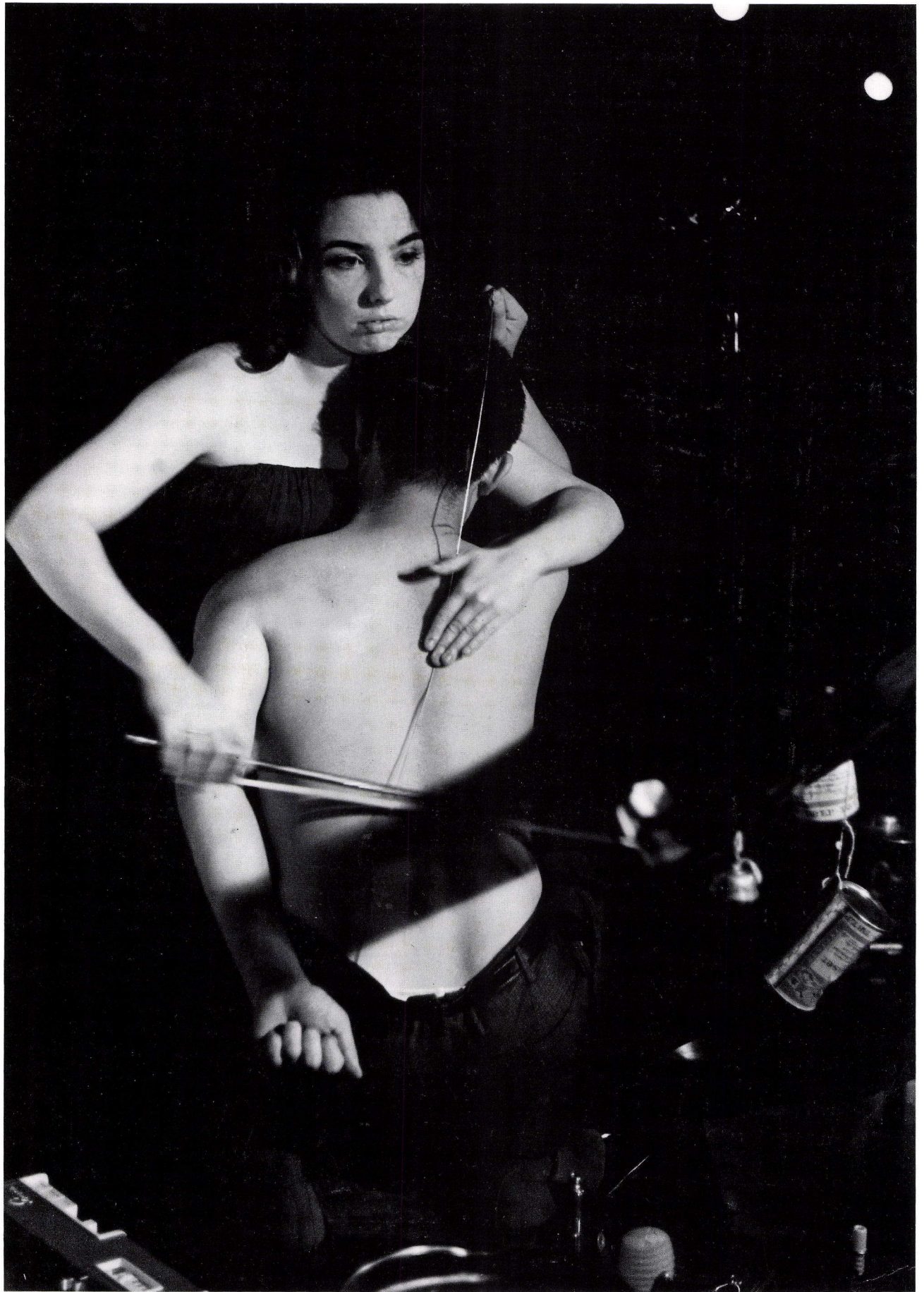
For the 1977 opening of *documenta 6* in Kassel, Paik produced his first satellite

broadcast (with Hessischer Rundfunk facilities) featuring performances by Moorman, Joseph Beuys, Douglas Davis, and himself. As a contribution to the exhibition he installed a variant of his *TV Garden*, the *Video Jungle*.

A year later, to mark the death of the founder of Fluxus, Paik and Beuys gave a piano recital, *In Memoriam George Maciunas*, at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf on July 7, 1978.

Since Paik's appointment in 1979 to a professorship at the Staatliche Kunstakademie, his home base has been Germany, as well as New York. Düsseldorf was where his first laser installation was created in 1980, in cooperation with photographer and communication designer Horst H. Baumann. Laser projections enhance the spatial effect of the television image. In *Laser Video Space I*, Paik used old pictorial material modified by lasers and projected into the gallery (*Laser Video*, Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf).

A milestone in Paik's career, from September 11 to October 24, 1982, was a comprehensive Paik retrospective mounted at the Whitney Museum of



American Art in New York. Organized by John G. Hanhardt, the exhibition covered a broad range of Paik's work, including his video sculptures and for the first time, an architectural structure, the *V-ynamid*. This video pyramid consisted of forty television monitors of different sizes grouped in blocks of four, on which kaleidoscopic images of ornamental quality appeared. In a performance staged for the exhibition, Paik took his *Robot K-456* out to a street near the museum, where he arranged to have it run down by a car, dubbing the event the *First Accident of the Twenty-first Century*.

With *Tricolor Video* (1982), Paik designed and produced a gigantic project using 384 monitors installed at the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris. Further complexity was brought to the work through the use of eight different videotapes and a game played with the colors of the French flag. The two exhibitions in New York and Paris made a fundamental contribution to establishing worldwide recognition of the Korean artist.

These two cities also figured in Paik's second satellite project, aired on New Year's Day 1984, *Good Morning, Mr. Orwell*. It was telecast simultaneously from the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris and the WNET-TV studio in New York, and featured a range of colorful figures from many branches of the arts, who appeared either live or on tape. From Paris there were Joseph Beuys, Ben Vautier, and Yves Montand; from New York, Laurie Anderson, Peter Gabriel, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Allen Ginsberg, Philip Glass, Mauricio Kagel, and Charlotte Moorman. The visual structure of the hour-long telecast is vintage Paik: heterogeneous images alternate in rapid sequence, both disjointed and joined in electronic collage.

After the great 1984 exhibition *Nam June Paik—Mostly Video* at the Metropolitan Art Museum in Tokyo, Paik continued to work on his robot theme. As a next step after his remote-controlled mobile automaton, he gave birth to a new-style artificial human form with *Family of Robot* in 1986 at the Carl Solway Gallery in Cincinnati. His clan consisted of grandparents, aunt and uncle, parents, and a whole series of children whose statuelike bodies were put together from old or new, wooden or metal radios and television sets, fitted out with high-tech video monitors and disc players built into them.

The next year Paik paid tribute to his artist friend Joseph Beuys, who had died

in 1986, with *Beuys—Voice*, a work created for *documenta 8*, Kassel, 1987. Constructed as a triptych, the computer-controlled central section shows a Paik-Beuys concert that took place in Tokyo a few months before Beuys's death.

In 1988, Paik's largest project to date was unveiled at the Olympic Games in Seoul, the artist's birthplace. *The More the Better* was a media tower made of 1,003 monitors. The film footage screened in them was provided by television stations from twelve countries. Also in 1988, Paik was represented in *Positionen heutiger Kunst* at the Neue Nationalgalerie, West Berlin, together with Kounellis, Stella, Merz, Serra, and Twombly. In Los Angeles at the Dorothy Goldeen Gallery, he showed *Beuys and Bogie*, and 1988 was ended with a large one-man show given him at the Hayward Gallery in London in the autumn of that year.

Marking the bicentenary of the French Revolution, in 1989 Paik introduced a series of robots and video sculptures representing Robespierre, Diderot, and others at an exhibition at the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris, under the title *La Fée Electronique*. The *Family of Robot* continued to grow in subsequent years. New members include *Don Quixote* (1989), *John Cage* (1990), and *Albert Einstein* (1991). Other events of 1989 were *Video Skulptur, retrospektiv und aktuell, 1963–1989*, in which Paik was represented by several pieces—the show was mounted by the Kölnischer Kunstverein at the DuMont-Kunsthalle; and Paik's first large-scale show in Seoul, Korea, *Beuys Vox 1961–86* (Won Gallery/Hyundai Gallery).

A highlight of 1990 was the *Video Arbor* large-scale installation in a public outdoor space in Philadelphia.

New work shown by Paik in 1991 at the Kunsthau Zurich included the thirteen-part video sculpture *My Faust*, in which thirteen global topics (environment, religion, education, etc.) are addressed. Each is presented in a neo-Gothic tabernaclelike structure frame that holds twenty-five television sets, adorned with various found objects and props connected with each topic. These structures can also be seen as Thirteen Stations of the Cross. Shown at the same time were older pieces of Paik's at the Kunsthalle in Basel, and as with aspects of *My Faust*, Paik autobiographical detail can readily be identified.

Eva Keller is Assistant Curator at the Kunsthalle Basel.

Paik and Charlotte Moorman performing their version of John Cage's *26. 1. 1499 for a String Player*, Café à Go Go, New York, 1965 (Photo, Peter Moore)

Solo Exhibitions

1963
Exposition of Music-Electronic Television, Galerie Parnass, Wuppertal, Germany

1965
NJ Paik: Electronic TV, Color TV Experiments, 3 Robots, 2 Zen Boxes, and 1 Zen Can, New School for Social Research, New York

Electronic Art, Galeria Bonino, New York (Catalogue)

1967
Nam June Paik, Stony Brook Art Gallery State University of New York, College at Stony Brook

1968
Electronic Art II, Galeria Bonino, New York (Catalogue)

1971
Hit and Run Screening of Video Films (films in collaboration with Jud Yalkut), Rizzoli Screening Room, New York

Electronic Art III, Galeria Bonino, New York (Catalogue)

Video Film Concert (films in collaboration with Jud Yalkut), Millennium Film Workshop, New York

Cineprobe (films in collaboration with Jud Yalkut), Museum of Modern Art, New York

1974
Electronic Art IV, Galeria Bonino, New York

Nam June Paik: Video 'n' Videology 1959-1973 Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, New York (Catalogue)

Programs of videotapes, Anthology Film Archives, New York

1975
Nam June Paik, Gallery Rene Block, New York

Fish on the Sky-Fish hardly flies anymore on the Sky-let Fishes fly again, Martha Jackson Gallery, New York

1976
Fish Flies on Sky, Galeria Bonino, New York

Moon Is the Oldest TV, Gallery Rene Block, New York

Nam June Paik: Werke 1946-1976, Music-Fluxus-Video, Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne. Traveled to Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (Catalogue)

Video Film Concert (films in collaboration with Jud Yalkut), The Kitchen, New York

1977
Fluxus Traffic, Galerie Rene Block, West Berlin

Nam June Paik, Galerie Marika Malacorda, Geneva

Projects: Nam June Paik, Museum of Modern Art, New York

1978
A Tribute to John Cage, Gallery Watari, Tokyo

TV Garden, Musée d'Art Moderne, Centre National d'Art et de Culture Georges Pompidou, Paris

Nam June Paik, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris

1980
Nam June Paik (retrospective of videotapes), The New American Filmmakers Series, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

Video, Gallery Watari, Tokyo

Laser Video (with Horst Baumann, assisted by Peter Kolb), Städtische Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf

1981
Program of videotapes, Sony Hall, Tokyo

Random Access/Paper TV, Gallery Watari, Tokyo

Laser Video (with Horst Baumann), Die Nützlichen Künste, West Berlin; traveled to Neuer Berliner Kunstverein (Catalogue)

1982
Nam June Paik, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; traveled to Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (Catalogue)

Tri-Colour Video, Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris

1984

Mostly Video, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, Tokyo

Tribute to Marshall McLuhan, Galerie Esperanza, Montreal

1985

Nam June Paik: Family of Robot, Carl Solway Gallery, Cincinnati; International Art Exposition, Chicago

1986

Nam June Paik: Sculpture, Painting and Laser Photography, Holly Solomon Gallery, New York

1988

Nam June Paik: Beuys and Bogie, Dorothy Goldeen Gallery, Los Angeles

Nam June Paik: Color Bar Paintings, Holly Solomon Gallery, New York

Nam June Paik: Family of Robot, The Hayward Gallery, South Bank Centre, London

1989

La Fée Electronique, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris

Galerie du Genie, Paris

Galerie de Paris, Paris

Mayor Rowan Gallery, London

Galerie Juana Mordo, Madrid

Weisses Haus, Hamburg

Image World: Art and Media Culture, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

1990

Hans Mayer, Düsseldorf

Pre-Bell Man, Public Sculpture, Deutsches Post Museum, Frankfurt

Galerie Van de Velde, Antwerp

Video Arbor (Public Sculpture), Forest City Residential Development, Philadelphia

Galerie Maurice Keitelman, Brussels

Holly Solomon Gallery, New York

Benjamin Franklin, The Franklin Institute, The Electrical Matter, Philadelphia

1991

Nam June Paik: Retrospective, Kunsthhaus Zurich, Kunsthalle Basel

Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf

Kaiserring Prize, Monchehaus Museum, Goslar, Germany

Recent Video Sculptures, Carl Solway Gallery, Cincinnati

1991 Skowhegan Medal for Video

1992

New Video Sculptures, Galerie Hans Mayer, Düsseldorf

Eco-lumbus and Rocketship to Virtual Venus, Seville World Expo-Korean Pavilion

Nam June Paik: Retrospective, Museum des 20. Jahrhunderts, Vienna

Public Art Commission, Chase Manhattan Bank, Brooklyn

Electro-Symbio Phonics for Phoenix, Public Art Commission, American West Arena, Phoenix
Casino Knokke, Belgium (Catalogue)

Nam June Paik: Retrospective, Museum of Modern Art, Seoul

Nam June Paik: Arti Elettroniche, Cinema e Media Verso il XXI Secolo, Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome

1992 UNESCO Picasso Medal

1993

Public Art Commission, City of Anaheim

Medienkunst Festival, Deichtorhallen Museum, Hamburg

Sammlung Hauser and Wirth exhibition, Zurich

Holly Solomon Gallery, New York

Artist as Nomad, Venice Biennale 1993, German Pavilion, Venice

Selected Group Exhibitions

1962

Music Notation, Minami Gallery, Tokyo

Notations, Galleria La Salita, Rome

1964

Fluxus Concerts, Canal Street, New York

1965

New Cinema Festival I, Filmmakers Cinematheque, New York

1966

Programmed Art, Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence

Visions of Today (symposium), Museum of Technology, Stockholm

Art Turns On, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston

1967

Festival of Light, Howard Wise Gallery, New York (Catalogue)

Light, Motion, Space, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (Catalogue)

Light in Orbit, Howard Wise Gallery, New York

The Artist as Filmmaker, The Jewish Museum, New York

1968

Sammlung Hahn, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, Cologne

Cybernetic Serendipity: The Computer and the Arts, Institute of Contemporary Art, London; The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington; Palace of Art and Science, San Francisco (Catalogue)

The Machine: As Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age, Museum of Modern Art, New York (Catalogue)

Art in Edition: New Approaches, Pratt Center for Contemporary Printmaking, and New York University (Catalogue)

1969

Electronic Art, Art Gallery, University of California, Los Angeles

New Ideas, New Materials, The Detroit Institute of Arts

- TV as a Creative Medium*, Howard Wise Gallery, New York (Catalogue)
- 1970
Vision and Television, Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Massachusetts (Catalogue)
- Happening and Fluxus*, Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne (Catalogue)
- 1971
Sonsbeek 71: Sonsbeek buiten de perken, Arnheim, Holland (Catalogue)
- Eighth Annual New York Avant-Garde Festival*, 69th Infantry Regiment Armory, New York
- St. Jude Video Invitational*, De Saisset Art Gallery and Museum, University of Santa Clara, California
- Videoshow*, The New American Filmmakers Series, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
- 1972
Twelfth Annual October St. Jude Invitational: Videotapes, Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse
- 1973
Circuit: A Video Invitational, Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse
- New York Collection for Stockholm*, Moderna Museet, Stockholm (Catalogue)
- Cremer Collection—European Avant-Garde, 1950–1970*, Kunsthalle, Tübingen, Germany
- 1974
Projekt 74: Aspekte Internationaler Kunst am Anfang der 70er Jahre, Kunsthalle Köln and Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne (Catalogue)
- EXPRMNTL 5: International Film Festival*, Knokke-Heist, Belgium
- Art Now '74: A Celebration of the American Arts*, John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington
- Eleventh Annual New York Avant-Garde Festival*, Shea Stadium, New York
- 1975
Video Art, Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania; Chicago Art Institute (Catalogue)
- Arte de Video*, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Caracas (Catalogue)
- Illuminous Realities*, Wright State University, Dayton
- Selections from the Collection of Dorothy and Herbert Vogel*, Clocktower, New York
- The Museum of Drawers*, Kunsthhaus, Zurich
- Video Art USA*, XIII Bienal de São Paulo
- Art Transition*, Center for Advanced Visual Studies, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge (Catalogue)
- Objekte und Konzerte zur Visuellen Musik der 60er Jahre*, Städtische Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf (Catalogue)
- 1976
Monumente durch Medien ersetzen... Kunst und Museumsverein, Wuppertal, Germany
- SoHo Quadrat*, Akademie der Künste, West Berlin (Catalogue)
- Dodspringet*, Svend Hansen, Charlottenborg, Denmark (Catalogue)
- The River: Images of the Mississippi*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (Catalogue)
- 1977
documenta 6, Kassel, Germany (Catalogue)
- 1977 Biennial Exhibition*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (Catalogue)
- 1979
Sammlung Hahn, Museum Moderner Kunst, Vienna (Catalogue)
- 1980
Für Augen und Ohren, Akademie der Künste, West Berlin (Catalogue)
- Mein Kölner Dom*, Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne (Catalogue)
- Treffpunkt Parnass 1949–1965*, Von-der-Heydt-Museum, Wuppertal, Germany (Catalogue)
- 1981
Partitur, Gelbe Musik, West Berlin
- 1981 Biennial Exhibition*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (Catalogue)
- Westkunst*, Museum der Stadt Köln, Cologne (Catalogue)
- Ein Klein Dussel Village Video*, Kunstakademie, Düsseldorf
- 1982
Videokunst in Deutschland 1963–1982, Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne
- 60'80 attitudes/concepts/images*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (Catalogue)
- 1983
Carl Solway Gallery, Cincinnati
- Wiesbaden FLUXUS 1962–1982, Eine kleine Geschichte von Fluxus in drei Teilen*, Wiesbaden, Kassel, Berlin (Book)
- 1984
Content, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington (Catalogue)
- XLI Exposizione Internazionale la Biennale di Venezia*, Venice (Catalogue)
- Art and Time*, Brussels
- Von Hier Aus*, Düsseldorf
- The Luminous Image*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
- Nam June Paik, John Cage, Merce Cunningham*, Won Gallery, Seoul
- Joseph Beuys and Nam June Paik*, Gallery Watari, Tokyo (sponsored by the Seibu Museum)
- 1985
Bienal Internacional de São Paulo, Brazil
- 1986
American Icons: Selections from the Chase Manhattan Collection, Bruce Museum, Greenwich, Connecticut; Heckscher Museum, Huntington, New York; The Robertson Center for the Arts and Sciences, Binghamton, New York (Catalogue)
- The Freedman Gallery: The First Decade*, The Freedman Gallery, Reading, Pennsylvania (Catalogue)
- Toys as Art*, First Street Forum, St. Louis (Catalogue)

- Carl Solway Gallery: International Chicago Art Exposition, Chicago (Catalogue)
- 1987
ARCO '87, Madrid (Catalogue)
- documenta 8*, Kassel, Germany (Catalogue)
- Art L. A. '87: Contemporary Korean Art*, Jean Art Gallery, Los Angeles (Catalogue)
- Animal Art*, Steirischer Herbst, Graz (Catalogue)
- L'Époque, La Mode, La Morale, La Passion*, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (Catalogue)
- Currents: Eight Contemporary Artists, America's Korean*, Korean Cultural Service, Los Angeles
- Computers and Art*, Everson Art Museum, Syracuse (Catalogue)
- 1987 Biennial Exhibition*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (Catalogue)
- 1988
Video Art: Expanded Forms, Whitney Museum of American Art at Equitable Center, New York (Catalogue)
- ARCO '88*, Madrid (Catalogue)
- Positions in Art Today*, The Nationalgalerie, Berlin
- Interaction: Light, Sound, Motion*, The Aldrich Museum, Ridgefield, Connecticut (Catalogue)
- The New Urban Landscape*, The World Financial Center, New York
- 1988: The World of Art Today*, Milwaukee Art Museum (Catalogue)
- American Baroque*, Holly Solomon Gallery, New York
- Private Reserve*, Dorothy Goldeen Gallery, Santa Monica
- On Track*, Nova Building, Calgary (Catalogue)
- 1989
Les Magiciens de la Terre, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre d'Art et de Culture Georges Pompidou, Paris
- Images du Future 1989*, Cité des Arts et des Nouvelles Technologies de Montreal
- Nam June Paik*, Arte Ederren Bilbao Museo, Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao, Madrid, with Galerie Juana Mordo, Madrid, and Holly Solomon Gallery, New York (Catalogue)
- Image World: Art and Media Culture*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
- Video Skulpture, retrospektiv und aktuell, 1963–1989*, DuMont, Cologne (Catalogue)
- Nam June Paik*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
- Prospect*, Frankfurt
- The New Urban Landscape*, Battery Park, New York (Catalogue)
- 1990
The Technological Muse, Katonah Gallery, Katonah, New York
- The Electrical Matter Festival*, The Painted Bride Art Center, Philadelphia
- Gegenwart-Ewigkeit*, Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin (Catalogue)
- 1991
ARCO 91, Madrid
- CIAE 91*, Chicago International Art Exposition
- Videowall*, 1991
- Videochandeliers*, 1991, Weisser Raum Gallery, Hamburg
- Neon-TV/Video-Objekte*, Galerie Lupke, Frankfurt
- I Love Art*, Watari Museum, Tokyo (Catalogue)
- 1992
ARCO 92, Madrid
- CIAE 92*, Chicago International Art Fair
- Pour la Suite du Monde*, Musée d'Art Contemporain de Montreal
- Territorium Artis*, Kunst und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn
- X6-New Directions in Multiples*, The Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, Connecticut; The Dayton Art Institute; Franklin and Marshall College, Pennsylvania
- Flux Attitudes*, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York
- Things that Go Bump in the Night*, Palm Beach Community College Museum of Art, Lake Worth, Florida
- Nam June Paik: Video and Paper with Allen Ginsberg*, Gallery Meegun, Seoul (Catalogue)
- 1993
Art Miami 1993, Miami
- ARCO 1993*, Madrid (Catalogue)
- Art Dealers Association of America 1993*, New York
- Taejon Exposition*, Korea

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- Cage, John. *A Year From Monday*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, Connecticut
- 1964
"The Media: Taking Waste Out of the Wasteland," *Time*, May 30
- 1965
Canaday, John. "Art: the Electronic-Kinetic Trend," *The New York Times*, December 4
- Klein, Howard. "A Happening Opens Festival," *The New York Times*, December 26
- 1966
Gruen, John. *The New Bohemia: The Combine Generation*, Grosset and Dunlap, New York
- 1967
Baker, Russell. "Observer: Seated One Day at the Cello," *The New York Times*, May 14
- O'Neal, Paul. "Nudity in Public," *Life*, October 13
- 1968
Glueck, Grace. "The World Is So Boring," *The New York Times*, May 5
- 1970
Davis, Douglas. "Electronic Wallpaper," *Newsweek*, August 24
- Youngblood, Gene. *Expanded Cinema*, E. P. Dutton, New York
- 1972
"Video Revolution: Patricia Sloan Discusses the Work of Nam June Paik," *Art and Artists*, March
- Davis, D. "Video Obscura," *Artforum*, April
- 1973
Hulten, K. G. Pontus, and Bill Kluver. *The New York Collection Portfolio*, Experiments in Art Technology, New York
- Ross, D. "Process & Ritual," *Artscan*, October
- 1974
Frampton, H. "Withering Away of the State of Art," *Artforum*, December
- Schimmel, P. "Abstract Time: Nam June Paik," *Arts*, December
- Kramer, Hilton. "A Fast Sequence of Forms Changing Color and Shape," *The New York Times*, October 3
- Sanna, J. de. "Artvideotape: Does it Work?" *Domus*, May
- 1975
Tomkins, Calvin. "Profiles: Video Visionary," *The New Yorker*, May 5
- 1976
Battcock, G. "Exhibitions in New York," *Domus*, June
- Catoir, Barbara. "Buddha meditiert vor seinem eigenen Abbild," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, December 7
- Herzogenrath, Wulf. "Video Art in West Germany: From Reproduction to Medium of Conscious Creativity," *Studio*, May
- Herzogenrath, Wulf. *Nam June Paik: Werke 1946-1976. Musik-Fluxus-Video*
- O'Conner, John. "Moving into X-rated TV," *The New York Times*, March 14
- Perrone, J. "Ins and Outs of Video," *Artforum*, June
- Ross, D. "Provisional Overview of Artist's Television in the US," *Studio*, May
- Sakane, Itsuo. "Amerikano Meidano Tabikara, No. 4," *Asahi Shimbun*, December 9
- 1977
"Video Visions—A Medium Discovers Itself," New American Library, New York
- Gruterich, M. "Kölnischer Kunstverein: Ausstellung," *Pantheon*, April
- Price, J. "Video ART: a Medium Discovering Itself," *ARTnews*, January
- Price, Jonathan. "Nam June Paik: Day-glow Godfather"
- Restany, Pierre. "In Cerca di Documenta 6 at Kassel," *Domus*, 574, September

- Stevens, Mark. "Holy Foolishness," *Newsweek*, August 8
- 1978
Battcock, Gregory, ed. *New Artists Video: A Critical Anthology*, E. P. Dutton, New York
- 1979
Fargier, Jean-Paul. "Paikologie," *Cahiers du Cinema*, April
- Weiner, D. "Test-tube Television: at WNET's Experimental Workshop," *American Film*, March
- 1980
"Random Access Information," *Artforum*, September
- Hoberman, J. "Mr. Paik's Mondo Video," *Village Voice*, March 3
- Keil, B. "Video Philosopher," *Artweek*, July 5
- 1981
Furlong, C. "AFI Frames the Field: the National Video Festival," *Afterimage*, October
- 1982
Denison, D. C. "Video Art's Guru," *The New York Times Magazine*, Sunday, April 25
- Drukker, L. "Nam June Paik: Video Artist Upsets Reality," *Pop Photographer*, August
- Gardner, Paul. "Tuning in to Nam June Paik," *ARTnews*, May
- Freed, H. [Whitney Museum, New York; traveling exhibit]. *Art Journal*, Fall
- Gever, M. "Pomp and Circumstances: the Coronation of Nam June Paik," *Afterimage*, October
- Glueck, Grace. "Nam June Paik Has Show at Whitney," *The New York Times*, May 7
- Hoberman, J. "Paik's Peak," *Village Voice*, May 25
- Hoberman, J. "Veni, Vidi, Video," *Film Comment*, May/June
- Hughes, Robert. "Electronic Finger Painting," *Time*, May 17
- Kurtz, Bruce. "Paikvision," *Artforum*, October
- Larson, K. "Nam June Paik's Zen Video," *New York*, May 24
- Platt, S. "San Francisco International Video Festival: Moving Forward," *Artweek*, December
- Puvogel, R. "Videokunst in Deutschland 1963-1982," *Kunstwerk*, October
- Ratcliff, C. "Video Art: Paik's Peak," *Saturday Review*, May
- Renouf, R. "Nam June Paik: Historical Juxtapositions," *Artweek*, January
- Sharpe, Willoughby. "Exclusive Interview of Nam June Paik," *Video*, 80, 4
- Sturken, Marita. "Video Guru," *American Film*, May
- 1983
Catalogue for Wiesbaden *FLUXUS 1962-1982: Eine kleine Geschichte von FLUXUS in drei Teilen* exhibit
- "Fourteenth Street," *The New Yorker*, September
- Edelman, Frederic. "Nam June Paik a Distance," *Le Monde*, January 2/3
- Herzogenrath, Wulf. "Nam June Paik," *Verlag Silke Schreiber*, Munich (Monograph)
- Sturken, M. "Whitney Sampler," *Afterimage*, October
- 1984
Mostly Video: Nam June Paik. Tokyo, Metropolitan Art Museum
- Nam June Paik Time Collage*. Shizuko Watari
- Battcock, Gregory and Robert Nickas, eds. *The Art of Performance*, E. P. Dutton, New York
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- 1985
Decker, Edith. *Paik Video: Die Installationen 1963-1984* (doctoral dissertation), Universität Hamburg
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- Gray, Paul. "For a Video Artist: It's Happening Here," *Time*, July 8
- Hornbacher, Sara. "Editor's Statement: Video: The Reflexive Medium," *Art Journal*, Fall
- Wooster, Ann Sargent. "Why Don't They Tell Stories Like They Used To?" *Art Journal*, Fall
- 1986
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- Carr, C. "Beam Me Up, Nam June," *Village Voice*, October 14
- Fargier, J. P. "Triomphe du Digital," *Cahiers du Cinéma*, April
- Garcia, Guy D. "People," *Time*, October 6
- Indiana, Gary. "Informania," *Village Voice*, October 14
- McGill, Douglas, C. "Art People," *The New York Times*, October 3
- Muchnic, Suzanne. "Talking Trees, Neon Vitures, Giraffe Nets," *Los Angeles Times*, November 2
- O'Connor, John J. "Bye-Bye Kipling on 13, A Video Adventure," *The New York Times*, October 6
- Ornia, J. R. Perez. "Nam June Paik, Pionero del Videoarte Presenta la Instalacion TV Garden," *El Pais*, December 18
- Rubey, Dan. "Nam June Paik/Holly Solomon," *The New York Times* (Friday Reviews)

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- Drake, P. [Holly Solomon Gallery, New York: exhibit]. *Flash Art*, December/January
- Fallat, T. “Video Babies and the Mountain,” *High Performance*, 10, no. 2
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- Gimelson, Deborah. “Expositions,” *Art and Auction*, September
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