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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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