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# Video Tape Analysis: *Guadalcanal Requiem*

## Colophon

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## Guadalcanal Requiem: Video Tape Analysis

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Nam June Paik left various versions of video tapes<sup>1</sup> in his video archives, which is now housed in Nam June Paik Art Center Video Archives: included are various versions of video tapes such as <Video Synthesizer><sup>1970/1971</sup>, <Global Groove><sup>1973</sup>, <A Tribute to John Cage><sup>1973</sup>, <Suite 212><sup>1975</sup>, <Guadalcanal Requiem><sup>1977(1979)</sup>, and among others. Also Paik's satellite projects such as <Good Morning, Mr. Orwell><sup>1984</sup> exist in several different edited versions. Paik did not insist that a video tape should be kept in an unchangeable master format at all, but he produced various edited versions depending on different situations. Believing that analysis of different versions of Paik's video tapes would build up the foundation for basic research as well as aim for increase in research value of the Video Archives, Nam June Paik Art Center launches Video Archives analysis project. The project is intended not only to carry out content analysis, editing and manipulation

analysis, and sequence analysis, but also to put forth discourses from diverse perspectives.

The first title is <Guadalcanal Requiem> which was produced by Nam June Paik and Charlotte Moorman in 1977. It is a video tape filmed in Guadalcanal, the Solomon Islands, for two weeks at the end of 1976. Guadalcanal, located in southeastern part of the Solomon Islands, is the place where American and Japanese military forces had fierce battles from August 1942 to February 1943 during the Second World War, for which the former American President John F. Kennedy was stationed. Granted 17,000 U.S. dollars from Rockefeller Foundation<sup>2</sup> in 1976, Paik was an artist-in-residence at the TV Laboratory at WNET/Channel 13<sup>3</sup> and produced <Guadalcanal Requiem> in 1977. In 1976, Paik was invited to Australia for John Kaldor Public Art Project,<sup>4</sup> where he had an exhibition and did some performances with Moorman. Afterward, they moved to Guadalcanal and filmed primary sources of <Guadalcanal Requiem> with the support of John Kaldor Public Art Project. Edited on 6 January 1977, <Guadalcanal Requiem> was

1 Nam June Paik's 'video art' could be grouped roughly as video installation, video sculpture, and video tape. We would say that 'video tape' is a moving-image work which could be screened as an independent art work or as a source image of video installation or video sculpture. Regarding the categorization of Paik's works, see: Wulf Herzogenrath, "The anti-technological technology of Nam June Paik's robots," *Nam June Paik: Video Works, 1963-88*, London: Hayward Gallery, 1988; Edith Decker-Phillips, *Paik Video*, New York: Barrytown, 1998.

2 With support from Rockefeller Foundation, Paik also produced video tapes such as

<You can't lick stamps in China>, <Media Shuttle / Moscow-New York> in 1978. Educational Broadcasting Corporation – Paik, Nam June, Series 200R, Rockefeller Foundation Archive, RAC.

3 TV Laboratory at WNET/Channel 13 was a video workshop project from 1972 to 1984. The project was supported from New York WNET/Channel 13, San Francisco KQED, Boston WGBH, Rockefeller Foundation, NYSCA(New York State Council on Arts), and NEA(National Endowment for the Arts). Artists in residence could utilize all studio equipments of the broadcasting station and produce diverse video/television works, some of which were broadcasted as regular

programs or provided as research sources to video art researchers.

4 Kaldor Public Art Project has organized total 27 exhibitions and performances from 1969 to 2013. As the fifth guest of this project, Paik and Moorman had an exhibition at Art Gallery of South Australia where his major works were on show, including <TV Buddha> and <TV Cello>, and did performances such as <Sky Kiss> in Sydney. cf. <http://www.kaldorartprojects.org.au/>

premiered in Carnegie Hall on 10 February 1977,<sup>5</sup> and broadcasted through New York WNET/Channel 13 at 10pm on 14 February 1977. The original version's running time is 59 minutes, which includes: actual footage of the Second World War,<sup>6</sup> American and Japanese war veterans' interviews, scenery and war remains in the Solomon Islands in 1977, local islanders' interviews, Paik and Moorman's performances, and excerpts from <Fist Fight><sup>7</sup> as well as <Edited for Television>.<sup>8</sup> This original version was re-edited on 20 December 1979, and shortened to 28 minute and 35 second version. The revised version left out excerpts from <Edited for Television> and <Fist Fight>, and shortened the duration of each sequence. There are two different revised versions in Nam June Paik Art Center Video Archives. One is the 28 minute and 33 second revised version distributed by EAI<sup>9</sup> and the other is a revised version with the 'Asahi TV' interview excerpts which still are included in the original version. Both of them are titled as 'WNET Revised,' but the EAI version has a caption of 'For Preview Only.' The difference between the two

revised versions is: the EAI version has 45 seconds more in the scene talking about John F. Kennedy episode; the other revised version substituted 'Asahi TV' interview excerpts for that 45-second segment. The revised version was broadcasted on 13 December 1979, on 2 March 1980, and on 16 June 1982 through New York WNET/Channel 13.<sup>10</sup>

<Guadalcanal Requiem> juxtaposes the Second World War footages and the actual sites where war traces can be found in the Solomon Islands. Non-linear time structure<sup>11</sup> was suggested through juxtaposition war footages and war veteran's memories. This structure could also be shown in the juxtaposition of war images and Moorman's performances. Paik mentioned that "... Main character of this show<sup>12</sup> is time."<sup>13</sup> The story of <Guadalcanal Requiem> starts with the Second World War. What follows the narrations on the Second World War<sup>14</sup> is the interview with war veterans. An American ex-marine, Bob Edwards talks about experiences in the war, and Japanese veterans visiting the war site again talk about their efforts to collect bones of war victims. Followed by these tragic memories,

5 *Charlotte Moorman and Nam June Paik "From Jail to Jungle" (1976-77)* Carnegie Hall 1976-77 brochure, New York: Carnegie Hall, 1977.

6 The footages are held at Sherman Ginsberg Film Library, and these were also published as war documentary series <Battle Line> in 1963 and also aired on PBS.

7 <Fist Fight> by Robert Breer, 1964.

8 <Edited for Television> by Nam June Paik, 1975.

9 cf. EAI web page <http://www.eai.org/title.htm?id=4229.htm?id=4229>.

10 Nam June Paik and John Hanhardt ed., *Global Groove 2004*, New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 2004, p.46.

11 Edith Decker-Phillips, *Paik Video*, New York: Barrytown, 1998, p.165; David Ross, *Nam June Paik*, New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1982, p.109.

12 <Guadalcanal Requiem>, 1977.

13 Hans Breder and Stephen C. Foster ed., *Intermedia*, School of Art and Art History, Des Moines: The University of Iowa, 1978, p.135.

14 From his essay First Oil War submitted to Rockefeller Foundation, Paik expressed that the outbreak of the Pacific War in 1941 was caused by American oil embargo on Japan. This opinion was also included in Russell Connor's narration in the beginning of <Guadalcanal Requiem>. According to the essay, as the US set total embargo of oil and freezing of Japanese assets on 13 July 1941, the Japanese Emperor Hirohito wrote in his diary, "... the question is oil." Japanese military occupied the oil fields of Indonesia, raised hell in Hawaii and the west coast, and conducted a peace negotiation with the US. Series 200R, Rockefeller Foundation Archive, RAC.

an episode about John F. Kennedy's rescue is told. These interviews are juxtaposed with actual footages from the Second World War. Tragic memories could be healed by Paik and Moorman's performances. Paik's <TV Bra for Living Sculpture>,<sup>15</sup> Joseph Beuys's <Infiltration – Homogen für Cello>,<sup>16</sup> Paik's <Peace Sonata>,<sup>17</sup> and Takehisa Kosugi's <Chamber Music> are presented in order. <Peace Sonata> shows that Paik dragging the <Violin with String><sup>18</sup> crosses Moorman crawling along a beach in a military uniform holding a cello in the back, when war footages are rewound to the beginning where no damages have happened. This implies that the time goes back to when the war has not started yet. In addition to these performances, Moorman plays the cello in front of Memorial Tower. The video tape ends with a story of local islanders'. The original version edited in 1977 has the ending composed of excerpts from <Edited for Television>, which shows Paik's idea on video art through conversation with Russell Connor and Calvin Tomkins. The revised version edited in 1979 has a new epilogue that Kit Fitzgerald and

John Sanborn, two independent video artists, read New York Times clippings regarding the Second World War and talk about issues back then.

<Guadalcanal Requiem> is edited and manipulated in Paik's style: the outline effect has been applied while colors of subjects are modified using a color mixer; the audio signals have been added to images as interrupted lines using a video synthesizer; another outline effect is placed on the overlapped images. The general editing skills for analogue video tapes used in <Guadalcanal Requiem> include cross cutting, inserting, overlapping, zoom-in, fast forwarding, rewinding, hand-held filming, close up, and repeating. Sound in <Guadalcanal Requiem> is also edited and manipulated by repeating, inserting intentional silence, or adding machine noise.

Paik's video tapes present various contexts and editings. They show colorful images, suggest historical analysis, and contain experimental performances. <Guadalcanal Requiem> interprets the Second World War from historical, humane, and daily perspectives. This video tape tells a story in an active way by

15 Two live performances in Gallery Bonino, New York, in 1976 and also in the Solomon Islands in 1976 are both presented.

16 <Infiltration - Homogen für Cello> by Joseph Beuys, 1967.

17 Edith Decker-Phillips, *Paik Video*, New York: Barrytown, 1998, p.164.

18 <Violin with String> by Nam June Paik, 1961.

arranging the time structure in a non-linear format, which would be one of the main characteristics of the video. In this context, visual images are presented in a mixture of colors and sounds rather than mono-tone documentary. <Guadalcanal Requiem> is a video tape with strong narratives, presenting historical footages as well as actual scenery filmed. Paik's narratives could lead many different discourses rather than force one-way communication. Dealing directly with war issues and presenting colorful and manipulated images with sound, <Guadalcanal Requiem> would be regarded as one of narrative videos of Nam June Paik. #3