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Between the Flash of Coincidence and Interference-Impulse

Colophon

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Nam June Paik and Jonas Mekas, who met and got to know each other in New York, had one thing in common: they were both immigrants. In the background of the friendship between the two well-known Fluxus artists, there likely was a sense of sympathy as both were immigrants.

“We did many things together with Nam June Paik over the years. There is nobody greater than Nam June Paik... But I am most fond of our political Fluxus performances. After all, we both were, and probably still are, exiles.”¹

1. Jonas Mekas, *A Dance with Fred Astaire*, Johan Kugelberg & Jonas Mekas (ed.) (TN: Anthology Editions, 2017), p. 71.

At the end of World War II, Mekas wandered the refugee camps in Germany after getting out from the labor camp in Germany with his younger brother, Adolfas Mekas, and then migrated to America. He said he received much help from Paik when he went through psychological and economic difficulties in the early days of immigration.

There might be several directions on how to intensively analyze their activities and works, laying aside their bond that is connected by the sense of kinship as immigrants. First, we can trace the direction of the discourse they presented while comparing the works of the two artists in the context of the Fluxus movement or the American Neo-Avant-Garde movement formed in the 1960s. And another direction is to infer the fundamental concepts that influenced their working process and components of their works, the process of conceptual formation. I am interested in approaching the concepts which are the driving force to form their unique world of works. In this article, I will focus on conceptual features that penetrate the whole works of the two artists and the formal characteristics constructed by those features. These concepts might be a result, of course, inferred from a personal perspective that interprets specific phenomena that



happen when we look at the two artists' works. It might be the process of tracing events that audiences experience by facing the works, not finding out the result of works which is the motive for producing the works.

If we remove the meanings that are over-assigned and focus on the pure state of looking, as Brian Massumi would say, we can understand that the experiences through figures are real and, at the same time, abstract. Massumi says about what is perceived when we directly and immediately see an object.

“We just see. We see what’s before us directly and immediately as an object. We see the “backedness” of it without actually seeing around to the other side. That’s precisely what makes it a perception of an object, rather than a deduction about a surface. We are really but implicitly-abstractly-seeing the object’s voluminousness. The perceived shape of an object is this abstract experience of volume.”²

2. Brian Massumi, *Semblance and Even: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts*, (MA: MIT Press), 2011, p. 42.

Mekas presented *Destruction Quartet* in the 51st Venice Biennale’s Lithuanian Pavilion for the first time, which was a 4-channel video installation consisting of footage containing four different scenes of destruction. *Destruction Quartet* was revealed in time for *Celebration of the small and personal in the times of bigness*, the exhibition hosted by Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne. This installation consisted of a stage record in which Paik smashed a piano (1997), a landscape sketch around the Berlin wall that is mostly demolished (1990), a surrounding sketch of Danius Kesminas’ performance that made a fire at a vacant lot in New York (1991), and a scene of the World Trade Center collapsed, which Mekas shot on the roof of his apartment in New York Soho.

Suppose the audiences separate the scene of Paik’s performance from four different situations (moments of destruction) that happened at different times and watch it. In that case, they experience facing the event that Paik, the subject of the act, caused. Paik sitting in a wheelchair, constantly pushes the piano and throws it down on the floor. Paik shows the act of destroying the piano over and over, pushing the piano almost mechanically and hitting the piano with a stick that is detached from a key. Mekas’ camera, which recorded Paik’s performance, makes the audience gaze at the space where the



simple act happens in a state of minimizing the observer's intervention. The observers have no choice but to keep their distance from the scene in the closed stage space of Paik's performance occurring. On the other hand, in Danius Kesminas' fire sculpture performance that he lit a fire and burned wood frames happened in a vacant lot, and it had an atmosphere that the surrounding viewers freely watched it. Mekas' camera can simultaneously observe the event and the circumstance, such as the performance itself, the vacant lot in which the performance happened, and the boy playing with a ball in that space.

September 11 Attacks were an unpredicted tragic event. In contrast, the Fall of the Berlin Wall was a politically planned event, but the public could not anticipate the landscape of the event. The records of the two events are contrasted with the two different performances of Paik and Kesminas. However, important events in modern history, such as the Fall of the Berlin Wall or the September 11 attacks, become abstract objects while divided according to the eyes of the observer's movement mediated by the camera. Thus, the sound and image of the moment when the World Trade Center fell, which appear after Mekas' face with a camera flashes on the screen, make observers witness the scene of the event through the distance (boundary) between the event and them. The first scene of the September 11 Attacks appears with the title "Ein Märchen aus alten Zeiten" (A fairy tale from the old days for children), which is supposed to be a line from the 19th century German Poet Heinrich Heine.³ While an old picture of a child appears in close-up, a song Mekas himself sings comes to the audience's ears. And then, the scene suddenly shifts to Mekas witnessing the fall of the World Trade Center on the rooftop. "Ein Märchen aus alten Zeiten" is identical to the phrase in Heine's Poem, "Loreley (die Lorelei)," so the title of Mekas' short video seems to cite this poem. The first paragraph of "Loreley," which implies a cruel and sad legend compares the shocking event on September 11 that Mekas accidentally witnessed.

I do not know what it means
That I should feel so sad;
There is a tale from olden times
I cannot get out of my mind.⁴

Mekas himself sings a Heine-style children's song about this incomprehensible event.

3. "Ein Märchen aus alten Zeiten" is the same as the third line of Heinrich Heine (1797-1856)'s poem "Die Lorelei." Mekas likens the story of this brutal legend to the incomprehensible and sad event of the September 11 Attack.

4. The English translation was done by Richard Stokes. The German version of the poem is as follows.

*Ich weiss nicht, was soll es bedeuten,
Da ich so traurig bin;
Ein Maerchen aus alten Zeiten,
Das kommt mir nicht aus dem Sinn.*



Listen my child, listen my child,
it was an horrible story, it was an horrible story which I have
never forget

In his book *Semblance and Event*, standing based on the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, Massumi says that when something's happening, we might try to gain an observer's removal, and this is where philosophical thinking must immediately in the middle begin.⁵ Suppose the observer's intuition can immediately—the condition of immediacy—have an insight into the essence beyond the invisibility of an object. In that case, can it capture the “liveliness and dynamicity” as they are, which are experienced in a way of immediacy, in a category of recording mediated by the camera? In his book *Matter and Memory*, Henri Bergson explains the “sensori-motor phenomena,” a connection line in which things and subjects interact with each other, in the 3rd chapter, titled “Of the Survival of Images: Memory and Mind.” “Images are not in the brain; it is the brain that is in them. But this special image which persists in the midst of the others, and which I call my body, constitutes at every moment, as we have said, a section of the universal becoming. It is then the place of passage of the movements received and thrown back, a hyphen, a connecting link between the things which act upon me and the things upon which I act, the seat, in a word, of the sensori-motor phenomena.”⁶ A brain in many images, a special image called a body, has a concreteness that position and place really exist in the passage of relating to things. Despite this, the brain becomes indeterminate and abstract in the continuity of movement. And therefore, an event also has concreteness and vagueness simultaneously. In the realm of the real-but-abstract that is “never present in position, only ever in passing,”⁷ it is impossible that the surface of the event, which the observer looks, or immanence are represented as they are. However, the process, the dynamic, can be expressed if the invisible change occurring between object and subject (observer), that is, the formal order with which we describe the process of abstract experience, is discovered.

Mekas spent much time practicing to handle the 16mm Bolex camera properly. Likewise, *Destruction Quartet* was produced over a decade of learning how to use a Sony video camcorder, with filming taking place between 1990 and 2001. Although there are technical differences between many videos works in capturing time, such as a

5. Ibid, p. 13.

6. Henri Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*, (Quadrige/Presses Universitaires de France, 1982), pp. 168-169: *Matter and Memory*, translated by Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer. (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1911), (ref. English version for Korean-English translation)

7. Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, (NC: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 5.



diary film that recorded every moment of life or *365 Day Project* (2007),⁸ the way of observing and thinking was identical. While 16mm film was useful in representing the vitality of the passing moment, the video was useful for recording the contingency of events that appeared through the continuity of time.

Mekas' a lot of works use the momentary effect, which the single-frame technique causes, to represent the process in which the power of affect is generated. On the other hand, *Destruction Quartet* might be an exceptional work among his works. To experience the spurt of affective power or its deployment process, an interference of invisible power, which is inherent in images, must occur. Since, in *Destruction Quartet*, the arrangement of the 4-channel frame, in which the synchronization is not matched but the channels are simultaneously played, makes each channel the symbol connected to one direction. Therefore, this work makes a symbol of meaning named destruction according to the context that the installation work is placed, which subordinates images to the large frame (one which is divided into four or one which four connected) outside of images, whereas Mekas' other diary films show magic—in terms of gaining the immateriality by concentrating in the materiality of films, not in the context of fantastic realism—like a contact of realism and cinematic illusion. Making a symbol through the arrangement in this way is a common scheme of numerous video installation works that are submitted to contemporary art exhibitions. Nevertheless, *Destruction Quartet* is outstanding. Danius Kesminas' performance in 1991 and Paik's performance in 1997 were intended to create resonance through action with the participants at the time. The specialty of this work lies in the fact that the points where such resonance intervenes paradoxically meet the ambiguity inherent in political events such as the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Twin Towers.

Massumi said, "It is the movement of our bodies that operates the selection," and "determinate vision emerges from movement."⁹ The performance of contemporary art is an attempt to break down the linguistic barriers that intervene in the selection and the fictitiousness of conventional wisdom. Performance is the act of opening an unknown place that has not yet been discovered among all kinds of thoughts about the piano, which is considered an object or tool, and various speculations or notions about the discarded stick. The piano is thrown to the ground, and the stick burns with sparks, thus

8. From January 1, 2007, to the last day of the year, 365 video clips were uploaded daily to his website (jonasmekas.com). This video diary was introduced as an installation work at several art museums, including the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art.

9. Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, (NC: Duke University Press, 2002), pp. 148-149.

opening the unknown door. The act of opening different doors by the two subjects forms a new timeline by connecting with the times when the Berlin Wall was demolished, and the twin towers collapsed, by the timeline chosen by Mekas, who recorded it as an observer. The nature of the assemblage suggests lines of decodification or deterritorialization. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Gilles Deleuze said of assemblages: “Still other lines open assemblages onto abstract and cosmic machines that they effectuate.”¹⁰ *Destruction Quartet* seems to follow a typical methodology of inducing interpretation by stopping at a particular stage of transitioning to a “cosmic and abstract machine that opens up assemblages” among the works of Mekas introduced in the form of an exhibition. His other exhibition works, especially *365 Day Project* or *In an Instant It All Came Back to Me* (2015), reveal materiality latent within the cinematic time frame within the exhibition space through the structure of multiplicity (reducing the whole by simultaneously connecting the segmented space-time).

Paik mentioned “the archaeology of NOW” in “Random access information,” an article published at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, in 1980.¹¹ Archeology of the present means studying the past to understand the present, and this expression is in contact with Mekas’ world of art in a different direction. In a conversation with Hans Ulrich Obrist (2015), Mekas says that even what we call “memory” and “thoughts” are a reality, that is, physical reality, and they are also the material of his work.¹² In his 2012 work *Out-Takes from the Life of Happy Man*, he emphasizes that the images are real and that his films are simple collections of images without purpose. Mekas did not use images that were objects he faced and focused on in every moment of his life, as mere elements to compose his works. He treated images as the life and energy of reality itself. The methodology he had developed captured the process of energy passing as it appeared and disappeared like a flash of light. The form of personal diaries and sketches and single-frame camerawork allow images to intuitively penetrate or emotionally respond to the essence of presentness through poetic condensation beyond the scope of duration or simultaneity. The nature of memory as a substance and reality as a material, perceived by Mekas, is similar to the direction of the poetic movement in which the subject and the world gain simultaneity through the camera.

10. Gilles Deleuze, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Brian Massumi (translation and foreword), pp. 504-505.

11. Nam June Paik, “Random Access Information” (1980) in *We are in Open Circuits: Writings by Nam June Paik*, eds. John G. Hanhardt et al. (Boston: MIT Press, 2019), p. 176.

12. *Again, Again It All Comes Back to Me in Brief Glimpses*, Kim Eunhee-Francesco Urbano Ragazzi (ed.), (National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Korea, 2017), p. 203.



According to the Bergsonism arranged by Deleuze, “There is always extensity in our duration, and always duration in matter.” and “when we perceive, we contract millions of vibrations or elementary shocks into a felt quality, it only does so by means of mind or duration, by placing itself in matter in a point of tension that allows it to master matter.”¹³ Bergsonian’s perspective is helpful in understanding phenomena that happen in the films of Mekas, who said that time and memory did not exist to him. Mekas, who believed that “poetry condenses reality,” wanted to capture the “essence of the moment, the divinity of the moment” in the film. Single-frame camerawork consisting of only three or four frames dismantles the conventional concept of “duration.” It makes it possible to approach that expands the arrangement of concisely condensed words of haiku and the imaginary affective domain (virtual world) between the lines, as Mekas wished.

13. Gilles Deleuze, *Le Bergsonisme*, (Quadrige/PUF, 2004), pp. 90-91.

In a lecture on Haiku in January 1979 (at the College de France), Roland Barthes said that haiku was “the conjunction of a “truth” (not a conceptual truth, but of the Instant) and a form, the brevity of the enunciation-how it framed-is already a form in itself; the short form is an inductor of the truth.”¹⁴ He talked about “the desire for haiku.” He said, “all arts of the aleatory (risk: that the aleatory not become a sign of itself), a consecution without logic yet without it signifying the destruction of logic: a neutral consecution-such would be the surface of a collection of haiku.”¹⁵ As Roland Barthes said, haiku is an art of contingency that has no logic but does not destroy logic. It is an art of revealing “space between matter” and attempting “condensation that’s anti totalizing,” that is, including “a practice of spaced time (cf. infra on the Instant).”¹⁶ Haiku is close to the form that realizes the “simple collection of images without purpose” that Mekas pursued.

14. Roland Barthes, *La Préparation du Roman I et II: Cours et Séminaires au Collège de France(1978-1979 et 1979-1980)*, (Paris: Edition du Seuil, 2003), pp. 55-56.

15. Ibid, p. 65.

16. Ibid, p. 59.

The fifth reel of his film *Lost Lost Lost* (1976) is composed of a haiku style in which short scenes composed of one or two shots are assigned numbers (1 to 56). Scenes 38 through 41 briefly tell a fable of “Rabbitshit Haikus,” which discovers that there is nothing but a pile of rabbit dung at the end of a road that leads nowhere. In the last scene, 56, the story “about someone who is curious about the end of the road and finally arrives at the end but finds only rabbit dung” is retold at length from a third-person point of view.

The first half of the fifth reel shows his visiting Vermont for



summer vacation with his brother Adolfas and taking a close-up of the faces of his friends (Peggy Stephens, Herman Weinberg, etc.) for the mischievous purpose called screen test. Then “Rabbitshit Haikus” goes by. This part borrows the simplicity of haiku to bring out poetic condensation at the moment, revealing the physical aspect differentiated between the world and the subject.

Haiku “refers to a fixed verse of 17 letters with a pattern of 5 7 5 syllables developed in Japan and spread worldwide today.”¹⁷ Let’s take a look at a Haiku by Matsuo Basho, the master of haiku in the 17th century, in the era of mourning, when ordinary people’s culture flourished.

Broken water pot
Midnight, like ice
Silent slumber¹⁸

17. Matsuo Bashō, *Haiku of Bashō*, You Ok-Hee (trans.), (Paju: Minumsa, 1998), p. 163.

18. Ibid, p. 135.

In haiku, there are “season words” that represent the seasons.¹⁹

In Basho’s poem, ice is a “season word” that is a metaphor for winter. The season words “can be a concrete material or an abstract feeling.”²⁰ “Breaking a certain part of a poem to make a break” is an important characteristic of haiku, along with season words. Here, the postpositional or modal verb that creates a break in meaning is called kireji (breaking letter).²¹ The above poem ends with a break without kireji, but poems such as “The first melon this year / will I split into four parts / or cut in the lump”²² are examples of using kireji, “or~(~か [ka]).” Mekas’ “Rabbitshit Haikus” consists of one or two shots of a scene that can be considered a line of haiku, and Mekas reads one short word three times. Sometimes, as in scene 30, two words (the Clouds, the Wind) appear in succession (scenes 30, 31, 46, 50, 51). Every word he utters is related to a childhood memory or the change of seasons, including scene 1, in which Mekas says “the Trees” three times in voice-over. Like the season words in haiku, these words are uttered briefly and then paused to recall the memories of the seasons and natural scenery. If a numbered scene is a complete haiku, it is a series of 56 haikus. And if a scene is a line, it is a long poem with 56 lines.

19-21. Ibid, pp. 163-165.

22. Ibid, p. 67.

In the second part of *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania* (1972), which was made before *Lost Lost Lost*, the Mekas brothers visit their ancestral home in Lithuania. The film begins with the title “100 Glimpses of Lithuania, August 1971,” and shows 100



short poetic frames. Most of the single-frame scenes in Mekas' other works also create an effect similar to the poetic resonance that haiku seeks. The abstract world formed by images passing by like lightning flashes reminds us of the state of poetry that haiku tried to reach by the arrangement of minimal words, concise rhythm, proper discontinuity, and techniques of omission and leap that extend from them. This technique or rhetoric may result from exploring human audio-visual perception phenomena targeting a specific medium or an instinctive choice of the artist standing in front of objects and the world.

Mekas' single frame is the result of his intensive research on the 16mm camera, the optical properties of the film, and the limits of our eyes. In a 1964 review of "Expanded Cinema" for the *Movie Journal*, he mentions the possibility of escaping the limits of human vision.

Is our eye dying? Or we just do not know how to look and see any longer? The experiences of LSD show that the eye can expand it-self, see more than we usually do. But then, as Bill Burroughs says (I quote from memory), "Whatever can be done chemically, can be done other ways."

There are many ways of freeing the eye. It comes down more to removing various psychological blocks than to really look at the screen directly; we are separated by the misty ocean of our inhibitions and "knowledge." Experiments which Brion Gysin is doing in Paris with his "flicker machine" (read *Olympia* magazine) show that without the help of drugs, with a light flicker (even with your eyes closed) you can see colors and visions you were not able to see before and the memory of which (as with LSD) remains after the experiment.

(...)

We say the single-frame technique in Markopoulos's film *Twice a Man* bothers our eye. People have told me that after seeing Robert Breer's film *Blazes* or after Stan Brakhage films, they have headaches, which is very possible.

Others among us, those who have been watching these films



more often, feel that the movements are too slow — we could take so much more. Our eye has expanded, our eye reactions have quickened. We have learned to see a little bit better.

But still our eyes so limited! Some people can still see sprites and pixies. I saw an item in a recent issue of New York Times about a woman in London who can read colors with her fingers.²³

Among many things our eyes (optic nerve) cannot perceive, there are cases in which we objectify physical changes linked to the subject's movement. At this time, the impossibility of being unable to recognize the continuity of motion causes us to artificially create a kind of paused state, such as an instant. Bergson, who saw "the mechanism of our ordinary knowledge is of a cinematographical kind,"²⁴ quoted the famous Zeno's paradoxes and said, "Motionless in each point of its course, it is motionless during all the time that it is moving."²⁵ As he said, "A single movement is entirely, by the hypothesis, a movement between two stops" and the illusion arises from this, that the movement, once affected. In the chapter "The cinematographical mechanism of thought and the mechanistic illusion" in *Creative Evolution*, Bergson argues that the first function of perception is "The primal function of perception is to precisely grasp a series of elementary changes under the form of a quality or of a simple state, by a work of condensation."²⁶ The cinematic mechanism creates the illusion of motion through an arrangement of still images. This mechanism is similar to the process of making the audience feel the movement of objects or beings or perceive their properties through the artist's chosen "condensation work" (specific methodology). Haiku substitutes elemental changes with changes in seasons and environments and condense these changes into a single word. If one thinks of haiku, Mekas' films will come to mind, in which the snowy streets of New York or New York apartments where the sun shines on the living room floor pass by like a flash. The images taken by Mekas with a Bolex 16mm camera are a collection of moments separated from the continuous images of the external world that appear in a continuous state. Suppose that our perception operates by a mechanism that "of becoming we perceive only states, of duration only instants,"²⁷ as Bergson has analyzed. If so, Mekas' films may have found their form that can reproduce the phenomenon of "separation of moments from duration."

23. Jonas Mekas, "Expanded Cinema," Selections from Movie Journal in the *Village Voice*, February 6, 1964.

24. Henri Bergson, *L'Évolution Créatrice*, (Quadrige/PUF, 1986), p. 331; Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, (The Project Gutenberg EBook, 2008), p. 126.

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 333-334. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 325-326. *Ibid.*, p. 124.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 296. *Ibid.*, p. 113.



Mekas didn't work in the form of abstraction, which reconstructed the visual world from the perspective of Dasein.²⁸ Stan Brakhage, who said that ““absolute realism” of cinema is potential magic because it was never realized,”²⁹ also used handheld shots, editorial shoots, and single-frame shots. However, Brakhage destroyed the law of perspective and metaphorized the indeterminacy and uncertainty inherent in the limited visual realm. On the other hand, Mekas' films captured the process of the appearance and disappearance of a flash of chance, which the motility comes hard to capture within a concrete form of life.

The “archeology of the present” mentioned by Paik in “Random Access Information” destroys conventional time rules and explores the origin of temporal phenomena. In that respect, the archeology of the present might correspond to Mekas' point of view. Mekas provided a new type of experience by drastically reducing the number of frames and representing the movement of momentary images. On the other hand, Paik expressed images of fragmented space as if it were the “rotating universe” of Kurt Gödel.³⁰ Gödel, a Platonist, thought of a “world without time,” which might have opened the possibility of proving that time is a conceptual construct.³¹ Gödel's said in his Mathematics that when the universe was not expanding but rotating, “the centrifugal force arising from the rotation was what kept everything from collapsing under the force of gravity, and an observer in this universe would see all the galaxies slowly spinning around him.”³²

Paik is an observer of images, but his video art seems to operate a kind of self-control that excludes his emotional flow and objectifies the subject in the production process. Of course, this self-control is closer to the flexibility of adapting the subject to the nature of the medium rather than strict control. This control is an organizing effort to produce the internal structure of the technical machine. Let us imagine Paik's working process according to the criteria that Felix Guattari classifies the properties of the abstract machine that heterogeneizes components. Paik's works do not correspond to “allopoietic machines which produce something other than themselves” but “autopoietic machines which engender and specify their own organization and limits.”³³ Guattari defines “the organization of a machine thus has no connection with its materiality.”³⁴ A projector projects an image, but the materiality of the image is separated from the materiality of the projector. This is because the inner circuit of the TV receiver that

28. Heidegger's Dasein is different from things or non-human beings. Heidegger understands that only humans are conscious of their existence and analyzes the relationship between these beings and the world.

29. Stan Brakhage, 'The camera eye' in *Essential Brakhage*, (NY: McPherson & Company, 2001), p. 23.

30. In Gödel's 'rotating universe,' the observer sees all the galaxies rotating around him and can travel back to any point in his past.

31. Palle Yourgrau, *Gödel and Einstein*, Kwak Yeong-jik & Oh Chae-hwan (trans.), (Seoul: Jiho Publishing House, 2005), pp. 294-295.

32. Jim Holt, *When Einstein Walked with Gödel: Excursions to the Edge of Thought*, (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018), p. 31.

33. Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: an ethico-aesthetic paradigm*, (IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 39-40.

34. *Ibid*, p. 39.



constitutes Paik's video art transcends the materiality of the machine itself by the artist's intervention (which induces the eruption of indeterminate and fluctuating power).

Paik seemed to instinctively sense the need for a tremendous ontological shift created by the relationship between technical machines and humans. In his article "Art & Satellite," he explains the ontological topography of a new phase created by human contact with new technological machines, referring to the segmentation of existence that occurs through artificial satellites.

"The thinking process is the jumping of electrical sparks across the synapse between brain cells arranged in multilayered matrices. Inspiration is a spark shooting off in an unexpected direction and landing on a point in some corner of the matrix. The satellite will accidentally and inevitably produce unexpected meetings of person and will enrich the synapses between the brain cells and mankind."³⁵

The function of artificial satellites predicted by Paik in "Art & Satellite" can be compared with the link between the current social network platform and human brain cells. The need for "autopoiesis from the perspective of the ontogenesis and phylogenesis proper to a mécano-sphère superposed on the biosphère,"³⁶ which Guattari emphasized in *Chaosmosis* in 1992, is currently in progress.

For Paik, "the work of composition was a painful process of conceiving an idea in the Platonic sense and trying to approach this ideal idea." On the other hand, experimental TV was to "find an unpredictable method, study circuits with that method, try various "feedbacks," and change the aspect of the waves by editing of the waves."³⁷ Therefore, his video art, which visualizes various variations by changing the aspect of waves, is a process of exploring an uncertain and accidental path.

Paik said in his 1959 contribution to *Jayu Shinmun*, "I have an assignment this year, which is to attempt to introduce spatiality into music, the art of time."³⁸ In his book *A Youth, Nam June Paik: Convergence Aesthetics of Early Arts*, Lim San borrowed the title of Herbert A. Simon's thesis and named Paik's solo exhibition in Wuppertal (shown at the Parnas Gallery in March 1963), "The Architecture of Complexity."³⁹ In this way, Paik's attempt to fuse the characteristics

35. Nam June Paik, "Art & Satellite" (1984) in *We are in Open Circuits: Writings by Nam June Paik*, p. 180.

36. Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: an ethico-aesthetic paradigm*, (IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 39-40.

37. *Ibid*, p. 347.

38. Susanne Lennert et al., *Nam June Paik and Media Art, The Beginning*, Jeon Seonja (trans.), (Seoul: Sungkyunkwan University Press, 2022), pp. 187-188.

39. Lim San, *A Youth, Nam June Paik: Convergence Aesthetics of Early Art*, (Seoul: Marronnier Books, 2012), p. 141.



of another medium with the limited attributes of one medium is an attempt to crack into the closedness of space by using the variability of the video.

Paik presented his first exhibition work, *Exposition of Music – Electronic Television*, using a TV set at an exhibition in Wuppertal in 1963. In the summary of the exhibition, “A Postlude for the Experimental TV Exhibition,” Paik emphasized that “My TV is NOT the expression of my personality, but merely a PHYSICAL MUSIC”⁴⁰

40. Nam June Paik, “Afterlude to the Exposition of Experimental Television” (1963) in *Nam June Paik: videa 'n' videology*, ed. Judson Rosebush (Syracuse: Everson Museum of Art, 1974), n.p.

INDETERMINISM and VARIABILITY is the very UNDERDEVELOPED parameter in the optical art, although this has been the central problem in music for the last 10 years, (just as parameter SEX is very underdeveloped in music, as opposed to literature and optical art.)

“My experimental TV is the first ART (?), in which the perfect crime is possible..... I had put just a diode into opposite direction, and got a waving negative Television. If my epigons do the same trick, the result will be completely the same. (...) My TV is NOT the expression of my personality, but merely a PHYSICAL MUSIC.”

Paik actually transforms the TV’s internal circuits to show different types of variations. In “The Postlude to Experimental TV Exhibition,” he said that he has been studying the dimension of volatility by meeting colleagues such as Hideo Uchida and Shuya Abe. The study of the dimension of the movement of radio waves generated by various electrical devices reflects the trend of change from the era of mechanical technology to the era of automation technology. In his famous book, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, Marshall McLuhan, whom Paik often quotes, says that the essence of automation technology is the opposite of the essence of mechanical technology.

“Automation technology is integral and decentralist in depth, just as the machine was fragmentary, centralist, and superficial in its patterning of human relationships.”⁴¹

41. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, W. Terrence Gordon(ed.), (CA: Gingko Press; Critical edition), 2003, p. 10.

This decentralized world is, as Marshall McLuhan put it, the age of the network “by putting our physical bodies inside our extended nervous



systems, by means of electric media, we set up a dynamic by which all previous technologies that are mere extensions of our bodies.”⁴²

42. Ibid, p. 69.

This network causes a process in which the dimension of the body, combined with the machine (technobodies), that is, transitions to a non-human state. It looks like Paik has wanted to approach such pluralized and temporally parallel steps in any form of work (even if it is not an art). Citing Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, he seems to agree with the statement, “Human consciousness (cogito) is ‘being for-itself’ (pour-soi), and it is impossible to unite with oneself.”

However, Paik's works on media convergence exhibition were only automatically converted through the internal circuit of each medium and ultimately could not reach the uncontrollable inhuman state. It can be said that the subject connects an external circuit to the terminal of the electric device to operate or stop it. It can be said that the subject connects an external circuit to the terminal of the electric device to operate or stop it. In order to save the representation that the conceptual subject seeks, his works participate in the process of “media becoming messages” and produce the discourse of the subject rather than go out of conceptual art's boundary.

Goethe quoted in his *Theory of Natural Sciences* what Johann Friedrich Blumenbach called “formative impulse,” personifying a kind of incomprehensible point from which organic matter is composed, referring to the impulse or strong active force that causes formation. We will call the first step for transformation, such as distorting an image through contingency, “interference-impulse” by borrowing “formative impulse.” This is because “interference-impulse,” the driving force behind Paik's objects, video art, performance, sound, music, etc., draws in contingency to induce different wavelengths and behaviors of each medium.

Paik's video installations, powered by interference-impulse, express a grandiose ambition that metaphors the “geometry of the universe” that combines space and time. The giant metaphor he attempted is a work of forming a kind of field. Audiences look inside the space within the sphere of influence of the magnetic field created by the magnet. Observers cannot discern the location of the inside/outside, but they can guess that this field was formed from the principle of mutual induction of the “electric field” and “magnetic field.” The field where we can find the interference pattern generated when two waves overlap suggests a 4-dimensional continuum. As Einstein



said, "The 4-dimensional continuum contains all simultaneous events at once, so objective division of parts is no longer possible."⁴³

Guadalcanal Requiem (1977), which weaves the past and present of Guadalcanal Island in the Southwest Pacific Solomon Islands, is a hybrid documentary collage including footage from World War II, a cello performance by Charlotte Moorman on Guadalcanal Island, narration, and interviews with veterans, Etc., are crossed. Footage videos of Guadalcanal, where the harrowing battle between the United States and Japan took place, is completed with air fighters, marines' amphibious armored vehicles, Charlotte Moorman performing a cello in a room full of natives, ingenuous natives' children, corpses of soldiers abandoned on the beach, skeletons of soldiers wearing military caps, and Moorman performing on the beach after splitting a cello in half, complete the requiem, being interfered with by continuation, repetition, crossing over, overlapping, and distortion. This work expresses the irony in the idiocy and misery of the Pacific War by crossing archive images and current images. Among Paik's many videos, this is a rare work with a complete narrative. The collage composition in this work is not a method of coding images by continuously linearly adding images one after another. It is an operation to shed the code inherent in the image while stacking and rotating the image around the centrifugal center. While the movement of images in Paik's video mostly belongs to the object, this work gains the internality of images without being conscious of the device that reproduces them. The collage here is closer to a discontinuous rhythm control technique according to the arrangement rather than adding. This technique works as a device to form a rhetorical pattern, and the arrangement of images advances the stories inherent in each image in a specific direction. Narrative video works form a narrative structure through the intervention of montage that stimulates the stories inherent in images. *Guadalcanal Requiem* also induces interpretation by expanding the story inside the image, unlike Paik's other works. The performances of Charlotte Moorman and Paik include the role of the narrator here. Moorman's cello performance is a gesture to soothe the tragedy on Guadalcanal Island and a device to express irony.

The reason why Paik's unusual work *Guadalcanal Requiem* is mentioned in this article along with Mekas' *Celebration of the small and personal in the times of bigness* is not only because of the interest in discovering the exceptionality within an artist's coherent world of art. The narrative structure of *Guadalcanal Requiem* is the result of

43. PalleYourgrau, *A World Without Time: The Forgotten Legacy of Gödel and Einstein*, Basic Books, 2006.



Paik choosing to “tell a story” using the arrangement and circulation structure instead of making the entire work an object of “representation” through “interference-impulse.” This attempt should not be interpreted as a momentary deviation. It should be seen as an opportunity to rediscover Paik’s video works from the point of view of cinematic experimentation, breaking away from the frame of the exhibition, building the immanence of images, and conveying messages through the technology of arrangement. For example, the *Electronic Fables* (1965-1972/1992) series, a collaborative work by Paik and Jude Yalkut that began in 1965, segmented or disrupted the plane of a two-dimensional image through electrical interference and metaphors the process of figuring. Like *Electronic Moon* (1966-1969) shot with 16mm film, it raises questions about the source of the image by overlapping images of the moon and circle. And like the video work converted to 16mm film, *Cinéma Metaphysique: Nos. 2, 3 and 4* (1967-1972), it metaphors the mystery of simultaneity and separation through the symmetrical structure created by geometrically splitting the face image of a person (Paik himself). Also, like the Beatles’ song “A Hard Day’s Night” and *Beatles Electroniques* (1966-72/1992), which transformed the appearance of the Beatles, it alludes to the cultural code reflected in the electronic transformation image.

Paik’s video images are like fish swimming in a pond, a TV monitor. In his works, images appear as coordinates that metaphor the world of uncertainty and variability rather than expanding the attributes of the image perceived by the artist into a structure. The “dancing pattern” of Paik’s video art composed of electrons and protons, or the movement of images that superficially looks like an assemblage work, might be an arrangement of hosts infected by “viral aesthetics”⁴⁴ that scrambles figures and ground. Alternatively, it might be a surgical process of transplanting into the medium an act separated from the traditional meaning system of art, which has been forced in art history. An article in the Internet media in 2022 announced that the commercialization of quantum computers is not far away. If a quantum computer based on qubits, which can be 0 and 1 simultaneously, is commercialized, how will the network of human brain cells change? Paik’s objectifying the subject stayed at the devices’ terminal stage as an abstract concept and wandered only in internal circuits. This might be because the artist intentionally refused to combine his body with an automated machine that transcends human speed. His video objects

44. David Joselit, *FEEDBACK: Television against Democracy*, (MA: The MIT Press, 2010).



are antennas that receive and transmit the signals from the universe of confusion, along with the mixing of information systems that occur when multiple radio waves are sent under the subject's impulsive interference. While sensing the signal, we are observing the shape that "time has disappeared."

Paik didn't mind many people imitating his works. Perhaps he foresaw the advent of a virtual world where Romanticism of art would eventually come to an end, and capital would dominate everything.

