This catalog is a LEA production with FACT (Foundation for Art and Creative Technology). It follows the first major retrospective on Nam June Paik in the UK with an exhibition and conference organized by Tate Liverpool and FACT. The exhibition Nam June Paik, December 17, 2010 to March 13, 2011, was curated by Sook-Kyung Lee and Susanne Rennert.

LEA acknowledges and is grateful for the gracious support provided to this publication by the Estate of Nam June Paik. In particular special thanks go to Ken Hakuta, Executor, Nam June Paik Estate.

Also, special thanks go to Mike Stubbs (Director/CEO of FACT) for his support.
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THE GLOBAL PLAY OF
NAM JUNE PAIK
THE ARTIST THAT EMBRACED
AND TRANSFORMED MARSHALL MCLUHAN’S
DREAMS INTO REALITY

What else can be said of Nam June Paik and his artistic practice that perhaps has not been said before? My guess is not very much... and while I write my first lines to this introduction, I realize that it is already sounding like a classic Latin ‘invocatio,’ or request to assistance from the divinity, used by writers when having to tread complex waters.

Nam June Paik and Marshall McLuhan are two of the numerous artists and authors who inspired my formative years. If one cannot deny Paik’s love of play and satire imbedded in popular culture and used to disguise a real intellectual and conceptual approach to the artwork, neither can easily be discounted McLuhan’s strong advocacy of the ‘art critic is perhaps obvious – as obvious was Paik’s willingness to challenge the various media he used, the audience that followed him and the established aesthetic of his own artistic practice. Taking risks, particularly taking risks with one’s own artistic practice, may also mean to risk a downward spiral; and Paik did not seem to shy away from artworks’ challenging productions and made use of varied and combined media, therefore re-defining the field of art and placing himself at the center of it.

The construction of this hybrid book, I hope, would have pleased Paik for it is a strange construction, collage and recollection, of memories, events, places and artworks. In this volume collide present events, past memories, a conference and an exhibition, all in the name of Nam June Paik, the artist who envisaged the popular future of the world of media.

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In the following decades, Paik was to transform virtually all aspects of video through his innovative sculptures, installations, single-channel videotapes, productions for television, and performances. As a teacher, writer, lecturer, and advisor to foundations, he continually informed and transformed 20th century visual culture.

Therefore, it seems limited to define Paik as ‘the father of video art’ when his approaches were to resonate in a multiplicity of fields and areas.

Paik’s latest creative deployment of new media is through laser technology. He has called his most recent installation a “post-video project,” which continues the articulation of the kinetic image through the use of laser energy projected onto scrims, cascading water, and smoke-filled sculptures. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Paik’s work shows us that the cinema and video are fusing with electronic and digital media into new image technologies and forms of expression. The end of video and television as we know them signals a transformation of our visual culture.

When Mike Stubbs and Omar Kholeif approached me to create this book, the challenge was to create a structure for the material but also to keep the openness that characterizes so many of Paik’s artworks and so many of the approaches that he has inspired.

I found the best framework in one of Paik’s artworks that was presented for the first time in the United Kingdom, at FACT, in Liverpool, thanks to the efforts of both Stubbs and Kholeif.

My fascination with the Laser Cone’s re-fabrication in Liverpool was immediate and I wanted to reflect in the publication, albeit symbolically, the multiple possibilities and connections that underpinned the Laser Cone’s re-fabrication and its medium, as well as Paik’s and McLuhan’s visions of the world to come, made of light, optics and lasers.

The word laser is actually an acronym; it stands for Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation. Nam June Paik undertook a residency with Bell Labs, who were the inventors of the laser. It was here that he created his 1966 piece Digital Experiment at Bell Labs, exploring the stark contrast between digital and analogue and his fascination with technology in its material form. His work with Bell set the precedent for artists and musicians to start using technology creatively in a new way.

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INTRODUCTION

This catalog became a tool to mirror and perhaps ‘transmediate’ the laser installation “made of a huge green laser that [...] compose[d] FACT with Tate Liverpool. Travelling 800 metres as the crow flies, the beam of light [...] made] a symbolic connection between the two venues of the joint exhibition of video artist, pioneer and composer Nam June Paik. Artist Peter Appleton, who was behind the laser which joined the Anglican and Metropolitan cathedrals in Liverpool during 2008 Capital of Culture, [...] commissioned by FACT to create the artwork, Laser Link, which references Nam June Paik’s innovative laser works.”

The catalog is in itself a work that reflects the laser connections, the speed of contacts, their joint exhibition of video artist, pioneer and composer Nam June Paik. In this phantasmagoria of connections it almost seems possible to visualize the optic cables and WiFi that like threads join the people and the media of McLuhan’s “global village” and the multiplicities of media that Paik invited us to use to create what I would like to define as the contemporary “bastard art.”

Lafranco Aceti
Editor in Chief, Leonardo Electronic Almanac
Director, Kasa Gallery

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR IN CHIEF

For me personally this book represents a moment of further transformation of LEA, not only as a journal publishing volumes as in the long tradition of the journal, but also as a producer of books and catalogs that cater for the larger community of artists that create bastard art or bastard science for that matter.

ENDNOTES AND REFERENCES

7. Art as a bastard is interpreted, in this passage, as something of uncertain origins that cannot be easily defined and neatly encapsulated in a definition or framework. “Art is often a bastard; the parents of which we do not know” Nam June Paik as cited in Florence de Meredieu, Digital and Video Art, trans. Richard Elliott (Edinburgh: Chambers, 2005), 181.
The Future Is Now?

Far and Wide: Nam June Paik is an edited collection that seeks to explore the legacy of the artist Nam June Paik in contemporary media culture. This particular project grew out of a collaboration between FACT, Foundation for Art and Creative Technology, and the Tate Liverpool, who in late 2010-2011 staged the largest retrospective the artist’s work in the UK. The first since his death, it also showcased the premiere of Paik's laser work in Europe. The project, staged across both sites, also included a rich public programme.

Of these, two think tank events, The Future is Now Media Arts, Performance and Identity after Nam June Paik and The Electronic Superhighway: Art after Nam June Paik, brought together a forum of leading artists, performers and thinkers in the cross-cultural field together to explore and dissect the significance of Paik within broader culture.

This programme was developed by a large group of collaborators. The discursive programme was produced by FACT in partnership with Caitlin Page, then Curator of Public Programmes at Tate. One of our primary research concerns was exploring how Paik’s approach to creative practice fragmented existing ideological standpoints about the visual arts as a hermetically sealed, self-referential canon. Drawing from Bruno Latour, Norman M. Klein and Jay David Bolter, among many others – our think tank and, as such, this reader, sought to study how the visual field has proliferated across disciplines through the possibilities that are facilitated by technology. At the same time, we were keen to examine how artists now possess a unique form of agency – one that is simultaneously singular and collective, enabled by the cross-embedded nature of the current technological field.

These positions are explored throughout the reader and our programme and in this special edition of the Leonardo Electronic Almanac. Here, the artist who goes by the constructed meme of the “Famous New Media Artist, Jeremy Bailey” tracks Rosalind Krauss’s influence and transposes her theoretical approach towards video art to the computer, examining the isolated act of telerepresent augmented reality performance. Roy Ascott gives a nod to his long-standing interest in studying the relationship between cybernetics and consciousness. Eminent film and media curator, John G. Hanhardt honors us with a first-hand historical framework, which opens the collection of transcripts, before further points of departure are developed.

Researchers Jamie Allen, Gabriella Galati, Tom Schofield, and Emilie Deveraux used these frameworks retrospectively to extrapolate parallels, dissonances and points of return to the artist’s work. Deveraux and Allen focus on specific pieces. Deveraux discusses Paik and Shuya Abe’s Raster Manipulation Unit aka “The Webcamulator” (1970), while Allen surveys a series of tendencies in the artist’s work, developed after he was invited to visit to the Nam June Paik Center in South Korea. Galati and Schofield stretch this framework to explore broader concerns. Schofield considers the use of data in contemporary artwork, while Galati explores the problematic association with the virtual museum being archived online.

It is worth mentioning at this stage that there were many who joined in contributing to this process, who did not partake formally in this reader or the public programme. Dara Birnbaum, Tony Conrad, Yoko Ono, Cory Arcangel, Laurie Anderson, Ken Hakuta, Marisa Olson, all served as sources of guidance, whether directly or indirectly through conversations, e-mails, and contacts.

Still, there remain many lingering questions that are not answered here, many of which were posed both by our research and organizational processes. The first and most straightforward question for Caitlin and I was: why is it so difficult to find female artists who would be willing to contribute or speak on the record about Paik’s influence? It always seemed that there were many interested parties, but so very few who were eager to commit to our forum.

The second and perhaps more open-ended question is: what would Nam June Paik have made of the post-internet contemporary art scene? Would Paik have been an advocate of the free distribution of artwork through such platforms as UbuWeb and YouTube? Would he have been accepting of it, if it were ephemeral, or would he have fought for the protection of licensing? This question remains: could an artist charged with bringing so much openness to the visual arts, have been comfortable with the level of openness that has developed since his death? There is much that remains unanswered, and that, we can only speculate. Far and Wide does not offer a holistic biography or historical overview of the artist’s work or indeed its authority. Rather, it serves to extract open-ended questions about how far and wide Nam June Paik’s influence may have travelled, and to consider what influence it has yet to wield.

Omar Kholeif
Editor and Curator
FACT, Foundation for Art and Creative Technology

SAN FRANCISCO
SÃO PAULO
SHANGHAI
ROY ASCOTT
KEYNOTE SPEECH

The Future Is Now / Nam June Paik Conference / FACT and TATE Liverpool

It’s a real honor to be talking with you in this context of a very great artist and a superbly curated exhibition, or rather exhibitions. At any rate, being of a similar age, I suppose I am working in parallel with Paik. So I thought before we get into the discussion with Mike, which I am looking forward to, I would just give you an idea of where I am coming from.

This is in Korea, where I have spent quite a lot of time since 2000. This is a shaman, as you might have gathered. It seems to me this is actually prepared to go into any space, any direction, any orthodoxy, any way up, which I think is a spirit upheld in the present exhibition. This is how I see where we are now but I know I have been asked to address the future, which is the context of this conference. The way we are now is, I think, telematic. I think we are all agreed upon that, we know how teleatically related we are and that it is not simply through Facebook. We have seen the wonderful effects of these connections in Egypt and so forth and on every sort of level.

The media is moist; it is a convergence of biological systems and dry computational systems; dry and wet make moist. The mind is technological, which simply means technology and consciousness coming together. We have extended our sensorium, that does not need any explanation. However, I will want to talk about secondary senses, which we have ignored since the Enlightenment. Our identity is multiple, we are making avatars and we are in a state of single self-mutation. We make many selves and they appear distributed in many presences. The body is transformable. The arts are syncretic. The reality is variable. The substrate is ultimately nano, which is vibrational. I could go on, but the most urgent necessity we have is in fact the reinvention of ourselves, never mind the reinvention of the state.

Before we get there we need first of all to reinvent or rediscover ourselves, which I think is also an old Buddhist principle. This syncretism is a useful tool but it could become a methodological im-
If you printed this,shifted it a little bit and reprinted it a million times you would see something like the connectivity that we have in the world today.

Think are still shared today, concerns with behavior, with identity, with chance, change, process, systems, participation and interaction.

On the right you see some of my students in London back in those years trying to create mind machines to get away from this idea of the art object as being a thing that just sits on the wall. So, very briefly, my first one man show produced a handbook, which was reprinted it a million times you would see something like the connectivity that we have in the world today. [Ascott is showing a picture on the screen.] But this was how one system that we used in Canada actually worked, running off the back of ARPANET; the military infrastructure for telecommuni- cations.

Of course the great attraction was the asynchronous nature of communication. Its not like a telephone you pick up in real time. You put the message out there, it floats out there and the recipient pulls it in at any time, any place. The piece that I did tried to work with that, it was called the Plerotear of the Text, essentially what we did was write a fairytale from networked nodes; computers in disparate locations around the world connected to a single network. It came out in Paris initially, developing a new online text over three or four weeks. I think there were fourteen of these nodes in total taking on various fairy tale roles: the prince, the princess, the wicked witch, and other traditional figures. This was the remake of it in Incheon in Korea last year, where we actually built a textual world that had textual interactions within it.
I was on the design board of Ars Electronica, the first new Ars Electronica building, not the more recent ones. That little chart over there tried to talk about the levels of activity that might go on in the building, where you force the director of the museum to look at the top floor and to gauge what was happening on the top floor should come to the, uh, the shrine on the ground floor. This meant that they couldn’t really go to sleep once they got the job – which of course they never did, but some might do. All of this was intended to encourage that kind of activity. I designed the lift initially as a bit of fun, not to be interactive, but to be a tool that people could create context for, which many people have done over the years. Then I did this little piece at Ars Electronica, in the picture that is the old building up there with big flower-beds all around it, under that flower-bed we had a railway built. I put a cut at all kinds of places using fax and online, such as you know about Gaia, about the Earth. You could lie on this trolley and float through the text coming up on screens, listen to the sound being played or you could look down on a map of images that people had sent. I'm sorry, I am rushing this, but there we are. This is how I see the shift, down on a map of images that people had sent.

I used to talk about the three VRs. One was virtual reality: we all had seen that before, it is the idea of a shift from the first representation and then the construction of worlds, now to seeing; it seems to me that the idea of planting seeds that grow according to changes in the environment is an important one. At the show in Graz when I announced my idea of moving media, this was a kind of manifesto. I tried to apply this idea of the coming together of biological systems and digital systems to fields of practice including architecture, building, engineering and so on. Since then, of course we have moved on so much media is no longer a really useful term. All these things, neuro, geo, chemico, cogno, nano, all of these media are being explored by artists. There is a great proliferation of interest right across the board in ways of looking at media that crosses the spectrum of wet and dry, natural and artificial, embodied and distributed, tangible and ephemeral, visible and occult. Such as you have to ask ‘so what was left out?’

There is some parallelism between understanding the communication systems in the body through biophotons and the communication systems across the planet through phononic and electronic exchanges. Let us look very quickly at where we are with the senses. There are four kinds of approaches to the mind; organization of matter with thought processes; a silent speech interface; body swap; and of course the big problem in consciousness that faces not just neuroscientists but philosophers, that is where is consciousness located and how do we account for the quality of experiences of smelling, of smelling, smell and so on? How do we deal with that in the meat? Equally then, the relationship between the brain and the heart is of great interest to us now.

We have eyes at the bottom of the sea. We have this robot being located and how do we account for the quality of experiences of smelling, of smelling, smell and so on? How do we deal with that in the meat? Equally then, the relationship between the brain and the heart is of great interest to us now.

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The only other thing I would like to quickly pull out from there is the idea of a shift from behavior of forms, to forms of behavior. But then also a shift from the first the representation and then the construction of worlds, now to seeing; it seems to me that the idea of planting seeds that grow according to changes in the environment is an important one. At the show in Graz when I announced my idea of moving media, this was a kind of manifesto. I tried to apply this idea of the coming together of biological systems and digital systems to fields of practice including architecture, building, engineering and so on. Since then, of course we have moved on so much media is no longer a really useful term. All these things, neuro, geo, chemico, cogno, nano, all of these media are being explored by artists. There is a great proliferation of interest right across the board in ways of looking at media that crosses the spectrum of wet and dry, natural and artificial, embodied and distributed, tangible and ephemeral, visible and occult. Such as you have to ask ‘so what was left out?’

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We are rebuilding the self and I think that is an important function of art practice. We are in a very ambiguous place at the moment: we don’t know what the self is we don’t know what our identity is.

So these second order senses briefly, we know what the first order were, Aristotle has laid it out for us, and neuroscience has produced the other ones; pain, balance and so on. For me technicentric systems, whether you use techno or somatic systems (Yoga, pharmaceuti- cal products), are designed to enable us to traverse, to further our reach, to other sorts of senses, and to other psychic states. I have used those words ‘second order senses’ because that is what second order cybernetics is about: the individual being within the system. These are words by the way, if you needed the warning which I am asking to leave the room, if any of those words entered your vocabu- lary. They are absolutely banned, subject to ridicule or extreme dis- interest, but I think the time has come to re-examine them with the sure you don’t, that you would be kicked out of any faculty meeting, any business meeting, any governmental meeting, just immediately.” and their reply will be, “Yes, but by the time I'm there we'll all be transparent” and I think they are absolutely right. We are rebuilding the self and I think that is an important function of art practice. We are in a very ambiguous sense at the moment: we don’t know what the self is we don’t know what our identity is.

A final point about the hierarchy of people in the world who have influenced us, Duchamp for me goes right at the top of the list. Then there is Cézanne, who was hugely important in terms of the different types of relationship to the picture, even within a painting you had to figure out how everything goes together. After Cézanne comes Pessoa, the national poet of Portugal, who created the concept of heteronym. When he died he left twenty eight thousand docu- ments, which were mostly written by seven, but in all over seventy, different characters. John Gay once said he cracked the whole Western notion of the unique self, just blew it apart. They were not simply characters or aliases, they were total persons who invaded him. Think what you will about that, but I think we are seeing now, through Facebook, not just a self-determination of what one is, but of the many that one can be.

So my final message is this while matter certainly matters, for we are all dealing with the material world, the mind has yet to be mined. If there is an agenda for art, and I wouldn’t be presumptuous to say there is an agenda for art; but if there were one at all then for me it would be consciousness. So that forms a kind of map of where I am now and how I see the world. I think that reality is syncretic and it’s unstable but in the most favorable, in the most fruitful, creative sense. I have probably gone over the twenty minutes that I was allowed to use, so let us talk and thank you very much for your attention.