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CATALOG

FAIR
AND
WIDE

BY LANFRANCO ACETI AND OMAR KHOLEIF

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is a co-publication of

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LEONARDO ELECTRONIC ALMANAC CATALOG, VOLUME 19 ISSUE 5

Far and Wide

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LANFRANCO ACETI AND OMAR KHOLEIF

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ÖZDEN ŞAHİN AND CATHERINE M. WEIR

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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.

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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 imbued 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 powerful tool that technology can be, so powerful that is able to obscure and sideline the message itself in the name of the medium.

"Marshall McLuhan's famous phrase 'Media is message' was formulated by Norbert Wiener in 1948 as 'The signal, where the message is sent, plays equally important role as the signal, where message is not sent.'"¹

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.

Paik remains perhaps one of the most revolutionary artists, for his practice was mediated, geared towards the masses and not necessarily or preeminently dominated by a desire of sitting within the establishment. He also challenged the perception of what art 'should be' and at the same time undermined elitisms through the use, at his time, of what were considered 'non-artistic-media.' Some of the choices in his career, both in terms of artistic medium and in terms of content, can be defined as visionary as well as risky to the point of bravery or idiocy, depending on the mindset of the critic.

That some of the artworks may be challenging for the viewer as well as the art critic is perhaps obvious – as obvious was Paik's willing-

ness 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.

*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 contemporary art.*²

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 scrim, 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.*³

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*⁴ 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.*⁵

This catalog became a tool to mirror and perhaps 'transmediate' the laser installation "made of a huge green laser that [...] conjoin[ed] FACT with Tate Liverpool. Travelling 800 metres as the crow flies, the beam of light [...] made] a symbolic connection between the two galleries during their 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, [was] commissioned by FACT to create the artwork, *Laser Link*, which references Nam June Paik's innovative laser works."⁶

The catalog is in itself a work that reflects the laser connections, the speed of contacts, the possibilities of connecting a variety of media as easily as connecting people from all parts of the world. 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."⁷

Lanfranco 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

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4. *Laser Cone*, 2001/2010, Nam June Paik in collaboration with Norman Ballard, installation view at FACT. Photographer: Stephen King.
5. FACT, "Laser Cone," FACT, <http://www.fact.co.uk/projects/nam-june-paik/laser-cone/> (accessed January 10, 2013).
6. FACT, "Laser Link," FACT, <http://www.fact.co.uk/projects/nam-june-paik/laser-link/> (accessed January 20, 2013).
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), 180.

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 col-

lective, 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 telepresent 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 Emile 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 a.k.a. 'The Wobulator'* (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

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1. See: N. M. Klein, "Cross-embedded Media," in *Vision, Memory and Media*, eds. A. Broegger and O. Kholeif (Liverpool and Chicago: Liverpool University Press, 2010).



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

RUTH CATLOW

This text is a transcription of a speech from:

Nam June Paik Conference

The Future Is Now: Media Arts, Performance and Identity after Nam June Paik
presented by FACT and Tate Liverpool

Friday 18 February 2011

I don't really need anything on screen to get started, so I'm just going to get started. Oh look, this is my homepage, I put this up so that I can feel at home. Hello, I am Ruth Catlow, as Sarah already said I am one of the co-founders of Furtherfield, along with Marc Garrett. I am really honored and thrilled to be invited here to speak at this symposium. I am a real enthusiast for the ideas, work and play of Nam June Paik. I say enthusiast rather than expert. If you want to find out why I am an not expert you can ask me some questions at the end, but I am a real enthusiast.

I think it is helpful for me to tell you a little bit about Furtherfield before we get started so you can have a sense of where I am coming from. We got started in the mid 90s – I was making sculpture and Marc was a street artist, involved in pirate radio and working with Heath Bunting in Bristol making various kind of artistic interventions into public and technical spaces. In the mid 90s Brit Art had the British art scene under a horrible smothering blanket and there seemed to be very few interesting places to either show, share, or even talk about the kind of works that we were interested in. The world wide web was in its early days, sparsely populated by corporate brochures and pet pages; and, if you knew where to look, art interventions that sparked your imagination in new ways. The

net was a place you could publish to (and perform, if you were very patient), experiment, connect and exchange ideas with people around the world. This all feels familiar now, but then it was very peculiar and very exciting.

Furtherfield is now an artist-run, non-profit organization with an international base; namely a community website. I have to show you this because it is our new website and we are enormously proud of it. In addition to the website we now also have a gallery based in North London. We are a diverse, interdisciplinary community and we welcome involvement from people who are either brand new to, or are still finding their feet, in this world. We place ourselves at the intersection of art, technology, and social change. We endeavour to stay open to new things, but at the same time connecting people who are now very experienced and have spent a lot of time with the ideas and practices that happen in this place. Collaboration and participation are core to our work.

Nam June Paik's work is both inspiring and entertaining in its provocative, experimental engagement and its philosophical range. In preparation for this talk I have spoken to a lot of my media arts friends to find out how they relate to his work, and how they feel about Nam June Paik in general. My ad hoc survey revealed that he feels like one of us. As Heather Corcoran, a curator here at FACT put it; he's a hacker, a tinkerer and a new-media artist. I think we also feel that inter-media, the term coined by Fluxus artists, which is used to describe the simultaneous use of various media, might actually be a

more useful term to describe this field of work. But it is a long, ongoing and actually rather boring debate for people who are not in it. We will have that privately in another space some time.

So here is this fantastic exhibition at Tate and FACT. We see here the energetic results of Nam June Paik performing the outcomes of his tinkering with objects and the media communications infrastructures of popular culture. I am going to argue with the exhibition catalog about whether Paik is the inventor and founding father of new media art. Simply because I am not sure that these networks, behaviors and artistic practices have a father or an inventor, unless it is possible to have many fathers. However, as I have said contemporary media artists do seem to welcome the connections with his expansive and playful processes, his spirit and his philosophy. At the same time they do make some important observations about the distinct differences brought about by the specific techno-social context of the 21st century.

What I would like to do in this very short space of time is to highlight some of these connections and some of the differences by discussing a couple of Paik's works alongside two other great contemporary artists; Andy Deck who is an American artist, and the Dutch-born Annie Abrahams, who lives in France. Both of these artists take the Internet as their platform, medium and channel.

As I was thinking about the main things I wanted to discuss I initially wrote down three themes and everything ballooned from there. This



What the Internet, the topology or the make-up of the Internet, does is transpose the decentralized and the distributed networks on top of each other; so now we are imagining two way messages between all of these nodes.



really could be a very long conversation talking about lots of artists because there are so many connections to make.

So in my notes, I have said, there are three areas:

1. Artists' appropriation, remixing and hacking of consumer technologies and popular imagery and media as a way to bring the audience closer to the artwork.
2. Utopian projections of a networked global world, which I think has already come up in some questions this afternoon. I think these are reflected in a darker mirror these days, but I will explain what I mean about this a little more later.
3. Real time cybernetic feedback loops, emergent collective behaviors, narcissism and reflexivity. Again, I think this is touching on some of the things that we have been talking about already today. I'm thinking specifically about Facebook narcissism.

We won't have time to talk about all of these things but hold them in your mind when we are looking at the works.

Nam June Paik was among the earlier artists to work with consumer technology such as TV and video cameras. He was also one of the first to consider their enormous potential, especially when combined with satellite communications. These popular globe-spanning contexts offered new possibilities for folding time and space to reach people in strange ways. The real time global performance *Good Morning, Mr Orwell* was broadcast into millions of homes in Germany, the USA and South Korea on New Years Day morning, 1984. The exuberant optimism underpinning this work, as if to say 'Hey George! It's not that bad after all!' finds its shadow in the work of many contemporary new media artists. Today, artists seem to take a more circumspect and critical view of the action of power and control on the interfaces and infrastructures of global digital communication networks; or what Roy Ascott referred to earlier, when talking about Facebook, as the collective mind. Paik's use of consumer technologies that the audience would associate with home, such as TV and more importantly video; a distributable medium and reasonably priced cameras are an early pointer to open network exchanges that are now the obsession of, I think,

the most interesting contemporary media artists in the post-Internet world.

I am going to explain what I mean by showing you an image, I show this image a lot so I apologize if there are some people in the audience who have heard me talk about this before. Before distributable video, the centralized network was the main broadcast model. So imagine an 'important, authoritative, white man' sitting in the middle of that star there. He is at the head of the BBC in the 50s in the UK, these points here are the nodes of people sitting on their sofas being told very useful and important things; but what they cannot do is feed anything back. Video represented a great shift in the distribution of ideas, information and culture because it was media that we could produce ourselves and then start to pass between each other, bypassing the central authority or gate-keeper.

What the Internet, the topology or the make-up of the Internet, does is transpose the decentralized and the distributed networks on top of each other; and allow data to travel in both directions between all connected nodes. The decentralized network allows it to hop between hubs over huge spaces of geographic and social time-space. The distributed network gives the infrastructure resilience and robustness, if we remove one of these nodes data can skip and re-route around it. So what the Internet gives us is this incredible kind of space folding, difference crossing potential. Video was the start of this, because it allows you to create your own content using cameras that you can afford. Then, you can hand it to your friend and your friend can hand it to someone and they can take it on the bus. So we start to have this kind of network distribution that is much more flexible than everything coming from one central place. This may seem incredibly obvious now, but the fact that Paik's work with satellite and video takes place in the context of this broader change in methods of distribution for popular culture is significant and worth restating.

I also want to show you this image that Furtherfield produced as part of a series of projects that we did called 'DIWO,' which stands for 'do it with others' as a progression from 'do it yourself.' This image represents our emerging understanding of what it means to be an artist in a post-Internet world and an artist who works with others. Here, the others are not only other people but also tools. From there we start this category hopping; they are tools, they are connectors, I think we might have Nam June Paik in the middle there although I didn't realize this at the beginning, we have laughter, we have a group of people, we have an icon, and we have a picture of a hand drawing. We also, I just want to point out, have a talking dildo as a nod to pornography, which we have to admit is part of our Internet. We are a part of this very rich and live Internet of things.

For the next five minutes or so as we draw to the end, I would like to think about what this connection of the network does to the feeling of art and what it does for our feeling for the technology that we have. I will try not to say too much.

It really thrilled me to find this as a video on YouTube, in this format it is very funny. Why is this a video I don't know. This is *Buddha TV* by Nam June Paik. I'll play it again but the joke starts to wear thin now. You see? I should have just have had a picture. The four elements of this work are: the Buddha, an object that both represents and facilitates meditation facing a screen; a television, but for the historically challenged it also reads now as a computer screen; a camera, where

versing with someone else on Skype, I'm just assuming that those of you who use Skype are all as vain as I am. Given that, I think we can now think of the screen as a camera and a mirror, and possibly Nam June Paik is pointing us to that. Another example I could have also shown is the Jeremy Bailey work that we saw this morning.

When Maria X wrote about Annie's work and she said:

Abrahams work exposes us to both how visceral and embodied the Internet becomes and also to how the artist's concerns do not provide us with technophilic utopian proposals, but 'to the vulnerable beauty of the glitch,' and she reminds us that yes, networks fail, as do bodies.

So that is the first pairing, and then for our second pairing I would like to start with *Random Access*, that John was talking about this morning. I was quite upset that I was not allowed to play *Random Access* at the exhibition, so here is a video that shows how an audience member might interact with it. They have picked up the tape head and they are running it over the tape and they are creating the work; so the audience get to decide how fast and slow and in what order sounds are played. Of course they do not necessarily know what they are going to produce, because they don't know what is on the tape. The idea, however, is embedded in the design of the

we can now probably substitute the webcam; and of course electricity and connections. The screen becomes a mirror. This is in some way a representation of the human as a part of the universe that is aware of the fact that it is aware of itself. It is about consciousness and possibly its flip-side: narcissism. There is a lot going on in this work, I think this work is incredibly deep in its philosophical range. I hadn't seen that piece in real life before. Today, over at Tate, I realized I was looking at another version of that idea in *The Thinker*. It also hadn't occurred to me before that I could walk behind it and then appear in it, thereby become involved in the work. So that realization then brought another aspect to it. It is a contemplation of contemplation, and a reflection of a certain kind of consciousness.

Compare *Buddha TV* with *The Big Kiss*, a telematic artwork by Annie Abrahams. This is a two hour performance so I'll just play the video documentation for a couple of minutes.

In this work, the object and the image of the Buddha are played by two people who are physically separated by continents. Not literally, but I think it is a useful analogy. The two artists who "create" the kiss are sited in spaces that are connected by a webcam. The two images are presented side by side to create a single image on the screen. The artist's instructions to her collaborator (and which she follows herself) are to "draw a kiss." Abrahams's work helps us to think about technology more in terms of separation (and isolation) than connection. Also to think about narcissism as the screen presents us with our own reflection. I tend to be very captivated by my own image when I am con-

work. Here, Paik is hacking a product of popular culture and inviting the audience to participate in the creation of the work.

And as the second of the pair, here we have *Glyphiti* by American artist Andy Deck. This is an always on, always live participatory, net art, drawing project. It was created originally in 2001 and updated in 2006. I'll just demonstrate it for you, here you can see my cursor on screen. So you can see where I am, and as you can see if I click a square turns white. I can draw in these spaces so let me demonstrate this: let's make the classic contemporary portrait. Can you see where it has appeared? It has appeared here, where I'm indicating. Since I am an artist and I need to feel that I am earning my keep I drew some birds for you yesterday. Look, here they are, still here. *Glyphiti* has busy times and it has quiet times, you can sometimes come back to here and find that the whole thing has changed over two or three days. Sometimes you might find that a group of people have decided to go and play on it, then you can find yourself in there and see the things on which you are working completely scribbled out. What I wanted to do was show some stop frame animations of the changes made to work in a month. It is a public graffiti wall so you get your obscenities and you get the kind of base urges to inscribe in a public space, but you also get amazing, beautiful drawings and explosions of collective imagination in these spaces.

So to tie up. As with Annie and Jeremy Bailey, who we saw earlier, *Glyphiti* takes the glitches and blockages to feelings and communications that are characteristic of our daily interactions with the Internet of technologies, peoples and things as its medium and context. There are hundreds of artists and works that I could have presented from the field of contemporary new media art practice which would have the same level of resonance.

All these artists are making work that people encounter both in galleries, and in their living rooms and in their bedrooms. So we have this sense that these works are all encountered in different kinds of spaces. Nam June Paik's robot made it out of the gallery once, but this stuff is constantly making it out of the gallery, in fact it is escaping out of the front door. Many of them work within a critique of what it means to be an artist working within art worlds. For us the most interesting of Paik's contemporary artistic cousins demonstrate that technology and art are both not only mirrors for reflecting back reality, but also hammers for shaping and, perhaps, compost for seeding it. That is, its objects, its infrastructure, visions, behaviors, and relations; these things are about us understanding the world and shaping it. They all point to a new understanding of individual, collective, and species level agency as artists and tool makers in this network of things. ■



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