Asia Effects in New Media poster details
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Media-N Special Edition

This special edition of media-N focuses entirely on the CAA Boston 2006 New Media Caucus panel “Asia Effects in New Media,” co-sponsored by the Maryland Institute College of Art and the 6th Gwangju Biennale 2006 and chaired by Mina Cheon, who is Professor of Foundation and Interactive Media and Director of MICA Korea Program at the Maryland Institute College of Art. Mina Cheon is the guest-editor of this edition of the journal.

Mina Cheon put together a panel of fascinating speakers, dealing with a broad range of themes contextualizing “Asia Effects in New Media” from the perspectives of artist, curator and critic. They present a range of philosophical arguments, ideas and practices that offer up new and diverse perspectives for considering Asia in relation to new media and contemporary art practice.

This is the second of three editions of the journal to be released this calendar year: the first was in March 2006; the second being this special summer edition; and a fall edition to be published in October 2006.

Check out our Call for Papers link for details of the fall 2006 edition, to be guest-edited by Legier Biederman and Joshua Callaghan. It promises to be a thought-provoking investigation into new media practice and discourse - please consider submitting your contribution!

Rachel Clarke

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Asia Effects in New Media

Mina Cheon

Chair and Moderator of panel at the CAA Boston
Invited Guest Editor for Media-N Special Issue
“Asia Effects in New Media”

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Asia Effects in New Media, panel at Hynes Convention Center, CAA Boston 2006.
Left to right: Mina Cheon, Kim Hong-hee, Wu Hung, Stephen Vitiello, Sowon Kwon, Chris Gilbert, and Semi Ryu.

“Asia Effects in New Media” looks at the trajectory of Asia influence in Western art, while investigating the effects of new media art. By presenting alterior lenses in which art history can be reanalyzed, the panel instigates the rhizomatic effect of Asia on Western art and culture. Parallel events took place in the East and the West during the rise of modernism, when both sides looked towards their cross-cultures and co-authored the rise of technology. Although art based on new technology can be easily associated with visions of a Western techno-utopic paradigm, unwritten histories interrupt this common understanding and collapse the logic of the East/West dichotomy. The objective here is to trace how media cultures and new media art reflect Asia tendencies that redefine cultural territories and deconstruct canonical understandings of space and time.

The term “Asia Effects” is troubling because it can be viewed as pejorative, territorial, centering, and simply a counter-weight to Western ideologies and cultural constructs. But “Asia Effects” is used here to work off of those very expectations with a critical edge (or a wedge) which might serve as an “approach” / an “iteration” of cultural interpretation that traces paths between East and West and breaks down binary perspectives. Whether it is the “Western” artist who utilizes an “Eastern” sensibility to produce the avant-garde or the Asian economist importing western technology to produce a so-called modern nation, the radical in culture creates “clouds” of “Asia Effects,” that are not about Eastern philosophy, people, or land but about networks of ideas... of seeing the world in a manner that calls on our anticipation of Asia and interrogates it critically.
Here are various responses to our subject “Asia effects in new media.” The order of papers presented here differ from the panel presentation so that we may begin the series of texts with a personal essay by Stephen Vitiello, who shares his perspective of the Asia effects of new media by tracing the artistic and cultural influences from Cage, Paik, to Vitiello himself. Moreover, we end this publication with Kim Hong-hee’s text which responds to Asia effects in the public arts domain, that of international biennales, in which she claims that biennales are expressions of new media themselves. Her focus is on the non-Western biennales, especially those of Asia that offers a shift of centers in the scheme of international contemporary art scenes. Moving from the personal to public realms, the Asia effects in new media calls for intercultural strategies which Wu Hung suggests must have ‘deflattening cultural effects.’

Papers that are being published in this special issue are revised versions of those that were presented during the New Media Caucus panel “Asia Effects in New Media” which was a part of the ARTspace program at the 2006 CAA conference in Boston. The texts here will also be published in the International Symposia section of the 6th Gwangju Biennale 2006 Catalogue since the panel also served as one of four academic events for the biennale.

Asia Effects in New Media was co-sponsored by the Maryland Institute College of Art and the 6th Gwangju Biennale 2006. This is a Media-N Special Issue: Papers from a New Media Caucus Panel at CAA Boston 2006.
Now and Zen: Nam June Paik’s Magnetic Mirror in the Face of Boredom

Stephen Vitiello
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Now that I’m almost sixty, it’s time for me to practice a bit of dying. People of my age in olden times in Korea were out in the mountains accompanied by a geomancer in search of a propitious site for a grave. However, I’ve no money for that and land prices became so steep, let’s live and die by an ersatz.

The one good fortune in my life was that I got to know John Cage while he was considered more of a gadfly than a guru and Joseph Beuys when he was still an eccentric hermit in Düsseldorf. Therefore it was possible for me to associate myself on equal footing with these two senior masters as colleagues even after their stardom. (Paik, Nam June. 1986)

DEATH comes to the average star in fitful stages… Some astronomers, for example, now think that the more complex and dazzling patterns of the gaseous clouds are created by interactions between the aging star and unseen companions, either a large planet or another small star in the vicinity. Such an idea is conceivable because many stars come in pairs and large planet-like objects have recently been detected around other stars. (Whitford, John Noble. The New York Times, 1997)

When Nam June Paik passed away last month, his obituary in The New York Times noted that he was “a lifelong Buddhist.” I had known and worked with Paik for more than 13 years. While I can imagine that statement to be true, I had never heard Nam June speak of his religious beliefs. To the world, Paik was one of the most visionary artists of the second half of the twentieth century; on a more personal side he was a very practical man whose work was always foremost in his mind. Paik always let you know just what he needed and not necessarily much more. When I was working in SoHo in the early 90s I would run into Nam June crossing Broadway at Spring Street. He would check his watch (pinned somewhere on his shirt), and let me know that he had “45 seconds to meet” and that there were many things to discuss before he got to Mercer Street (a short block away). If Paik was a lifelong Buddhist it was one of many things that I believe he was and was not. His is a career of absolute certainty filled with wonderful but also challenging contradictions.

Nam June Paik was born on July 30, 1932. In 1949, with the onset of the Korean War, his family moved to Hong Kong, and then soon after, settled in Tokyo. Following his interest in experimental music and the avant-garde, Paik went to Germany in 1956 to study music history and composition. Traveling to Cologne and to Darmstadt, Paik encountered for the first time some of the major figures in the fields of experimental and electronic music - most significantly for Paik, John Cage. Paik moved to New York in 1964. Before arriving in the U.S. Paik’s body of work was already significant. He of course went on to be one of the most important and influential technology-based artists of the 20th century.
In 1991, the museum director David Ross asked Paik whether he now considered himself to be an “American artist”. Paik responded “I don’t see much sense in categorizing artists by national origin.” Throughout his life Paik would speak of being proud of his Korean heritage but he was also often critical of Asian culture. In the same discussion with Ross, Paik states “as an Asian, I give credit to Western Civilization, which has the dialectic power to regenerate itself constantly, whereas Asia’s history is yoked with stagnation.”

In preparation for this panel, I began by questioning the affects Paik, as an Asian-American artist has had on Western contemporary art. More and more, I have found myself instead looking at the effects that Asia had on Nam June and the strategies that he used to integrate and re-consider his own Asian identity.

It is easy to imagine that there was some bitterness for Paik in regards to the Korea of his past. He was not allowed back into the country (being considered a draft-dodger) until 1984, after 34 years of exile. It is also possible to imagine guilt or at least conflict in not returning to the country of his childhood. “We are really one of the most corrupted families in Korea. My grandfather made first modern factory there - textiles. Then, in Depression, we became very poor. Later, we have two steel factories in North Korea, but in 1945 they became ‘people’s factories.’ It was all luck and unluck. Sometimes I felt I was on the wrong side, because I had such radical thoughts.”

One could argue that Paik came of age not with his family in Asia (Korea, Hong Kong and Tokyo) but in the art and music cultures of Europe and the United States. John Cage often spoke of his interests in Asian culture, particularly Zen Buddhism. Tomkins notes in his 1975 profile from The New Yorker, “Paik tried to learn something about Oriental music and Oriental religion, neither of which had interested him until he met Cage.” Nam June while ever paying tribute to Cage was also critical at times. In a letter from 1972 Paik writes, “John Cage has out-asianized himself more than any Asians.” If John Cage was a mentor, and perhaps extended family in the most Asian sense, he was also the figure whom Paik would emulate, and then in an arguably Oedipal gesture, castrate (as art-father) in the act of leaping off the stage and cutting off Cage’s tie in the now infamous 1960 performance of Etude for Pianoforte.

While Paik was remarkably prolific he will perhaps be remembered most for his fast-paced, color saturated videotapes and installations such as the landmark work for television, Global Groove (1973) but also his far quieter and less colorful closed-circuit video sculpture, TV Buddha (1974). TV Buddha, along with previous works such as Zen for Film (1964), referenced Asian culture in title and/or form, were often minimal works that I have always felt contained a beauty but also an undercurrent of humor or even sarcasm. In TV Buddha a statue of the Buddha stares into a video monitor which captures the live image of that same figure and the space behind it. The television screen is the Buddha’s mirror. The statue and the reflected image are still. Irving Sandler writes, “TV Buddha is a media star and a couch potato in a Buddha Sitcom. But it’s not a one-line joke. What else can it mean? Does it demean an established religious icon in the spirit of Fluxus iconoclasm? Or, is it spiritual: the Divine looking at the Divine without interference? Instantaneous holy feedback. God using electronic media to contemplate Himself. Why Not?”

TV Buddha and a number of other works from the decade that precede it by Paik exist as singular actions or gestures. Referring back to Paik’s quote that “Asia’s history is yoked with stagnation” one might classify this and other works as specifically Asian. In Zen for Film, an hour of clear film leader is projected showing only the white light and accumulated bits of dust picked up by the film and caught in the projector’s light. In Zen for TV (1963) a single horizontal line cuts down the otherwise empty space of a television turned on its side. In Zen for Head (1962) the artist dips his head in black paint and uses his hair as a brush to paint a long single line. Where these quiet works seem to refer back to Paik’s past, his works for television including the aforementioned Global Groove, and others including the satellite trilogy from the 1980s, Good Morning Mr. Orwell (1984), Bye Bye Kipling (1986) and Wrap Around the World (1988) by title and by deed say goodbye to the past and refer to a global culture, of a world empowered by, not held back by technology.
In 1963 Paik wrote: “Zen is anti-avant-garde, anti-frontier spirit, anti-Kennedy, Zen is responsible of asian poverty. How can I justify ZEN, without justifying asian poverty??”10

I in no means wish to say (nor could I ever claim such authority to know) that Paik was ashamed of his Asian heritage but it did seem to be a complex relationship that he had. And, just as he was practical in his everyday life, he knew that his heritage was something that he could put to work in his art. Perhaps one could say that he had a creative tension with his past - a tension that inspired a great number of wonderful videos and ideas. While the television pieces such as Global Groove were considered landmarks in the medium, I find the “still” works to resonate just as strongly if not more. Cage too (perhaps not unsurprisingly) favored these works: “the most musical of Paik’s works are those for which he has given no performance directions, for which the accompaniment is simply the sounds of the environment. I am thinking of the ones which are just sculpture: TV Chair, TV Buddha for instance.”11

When I told Mina that I would be speaking about Paik, she encouraged me also to find a tie in to my own work as a sound artist. The previous quote brought me back to a couple of questions that I’ve started to think about. I’ve often wondered about the effect that Paik has had on me as an artist. Among other things, just as Cage brought Nam June around to an interest in Asian culture and spirituality, I came to be interested in Cage through Nam June. In all honesty, I am also very interested in and influenced by the so-called American Oriental music that Nam June refers to. I have been influenced by La Monte Young, perhaps more for his ideas than the sound of his works. But among Young’s colleagues, friends, enemies and followers there has been a great investment in the drone for example. I am thinking about composers such as Tony Conrad and Pauline Oliveros but also the French minimal composer Eliane Radigue whose work is very much rooted in her Buddhist studies and the quiet sound works of Steve Roden. The composers who I mention have also instilled drone-based compositions with a tension that keep them from falling into the new age fluff that Nam June may be speaking of.

Interestingly, I did a performance recently on a double bill with a choreographer. My piece included a long shifting drone that actually was the result of stretching out a live recording of Dolly Parton singing “Stairway to Heaven.” The only mention in the Washington Post review was that my performance was “inscrutable.”

Influence might then be thought of as a very analog form. Information comes as a signal flow from one person’s set of filters to another. Andrew Deutsch, a friend and collaborator of mine gave an informal talk to my students recently. Andrew and I were preparing to do a performance with analog and digital hardware as well as digital software. I was using a small photocell that translates light frequencies into sound. I was also pointing a small camera at those lights. Andrew was feeding the video signal from my micro-camera into two video synthesizers, including a “wobbulator” that Andrew had hand-built based on an original Paik design. Andrew talked to my students about Chinese medicine’s focus on energy flow and how that might be a valid analogy for the flow of our electronics and synthesizer patches. He summed it up in a recent e-mail to me:

“In Chinese medicine a meridian is a pathway for Chi. Chi is the “life force” in the body. A chi point is a place where one can contact chi by rubbing or inserting needles. Energy gets blocked at various chi points, this causes illness.

Thus the question in Chinese medicine is “the nature of the block”.

In video and sound, it seems we invent ways to bind up or block energy, then interact with that blockage in creative ways. The signal path equals the meridians, the electricity is chi, and the interface gives us the chi points.

Nam June found ways to block/release the frequencies of TV and gave us the Paik/Abe colorizer, the wobbulator…”

Above all, Nam June taught me to see a work, or a composition or a performance as a very concentrated output but not necessarily from the point of “composing” or rehearsing. I approach each work as a form of improvisation, which should not be deeply meddled with after the fact. What is so extraordinary when one is working with analog systems is the continued experience that analog circuits are very different than digital. They really are much more alive. As much as
others have told me, it is always a surprise to see how much an analog synthesizer or filterbank has a mind of its own. You can remember certain settings, certain patches but you’ll never get back to that same sound twice. Rather than fight the system the best thing one can do is to enjoy and accept it.

From what I’ve been told, Paik’s funeral was a mixture of color, words and a bit of frenzy, with perhaps elements of the energy he brought Etude for Pianoforte and Global Groove but it also had a bit of quiet and stillness. In fact, it sounds to have been a strikingly bizarre juxtaposition of the two as the funeral was an open casket ceremony that ended with the audience cutting their ties off and placing them on the resting body of Nam June. In life, like his work, he was colorful (in recent years Nam June was very often seen wearing beautiful iridescent scarves) and generally in constant motion. When he wasn’t moving, he was sleeping; anywhere from at home to on-stage for a panel such as this one. I tend to think of Paik sleeping as an image in black and white, a vision not unlike his TV Buddha. It’s hard to say how fitting the final image is, of Nam June as a sleeping Buddha covered in other peoples’ colorful ties, but I am told that one had to be there.

Figure 1. Nam June Paik painting happy faces, May 2000.

Photograph taken by Stephen Vitiello in Nam June Paik’s studio in 2000 [This photo as well as photos below and news clippings were gathered for a project dedicated to Paik’s archive that was sadly never completed].

Figure 2. Nam June Paik’s videotapes, painted on, one addressed to Korea, May 2000.

Photograph taken by Stephen Vitiello in Nam June Paik’s studio in 2000.
Figure 3. *Acupuncture as a new Zen for Head*, portrait of Stephen Vitiello by John Kang.

Figure 4. *Face Collage Sub Rosa 1*, Stephen Vitiello.

This is one of a couple of mock-ups for the cover of the CD: Nam June Paik: Works 1958-1979 (Sub Rosa)
Figure 5. *Face Collage Sub Rosa 2*, Stephen Vitiello.

Figure 6. *Paik’s Peak*. 

Paik’s TVs immediately propose that television will supplant writing, sex, nature, and travel—not to mention the museum itself.
Figure 7. Symphonie postcard (front).

Figure 8. World so boring from the NY Times.
My Head, 1996
Stephen Vitiello

[>] Hear soundtrack, My Head.

This is an audio piece by Stephen Vitiello from 1996. It incorporates a home recording of Paik and Shigeko speaking to Stephen about David Tudor’s recent death and the Tudor’s piano which was reportedly in such a humid environment that mushrooms were growing on it. Paik mentions that Stephen should buy it but first Paik would need to give him a raise.

During the presentation of the above paper, the audio piece My Head Was Spinning was played but there was also an ongoing silent projection of videos from the compilation:

Rare Performance Documents 1961-1994 Volume 2:
Hand and Face 1961, 1:42 min, b&w, silent
Fluxus Sonata at Anthology Film Archives 1975, 6:12 min, b&w, sound
Violin Dragging, Brooklyn, NY 1975, 1:37 min, color, sound
Tribute to GM (aka Video Venus) 1978, 2:56 min, color
Nam June Paik with The Bad Brains 1991, 1:19 min, color, sound
An Evening with Nam June Paik at the Kitchen 1994, 4:35 min, color, sound

Related URLs for this essay, selected by Stephen Vitiello.

http://www.turbulence.org/blog/archives/002025.html
http://www.eai.org/eai/02_06_paik_pr.html
http://www.eai.org/eai/tape.jsp?itemID=4197
http://vasulka.org/Videomasters/pages_stills/index_126.html
http://www.ubu.com/aspen/aspen6A/softTransformations.html
http://www.ubu.com/sound/paik.html
http://ubu.artmob.ca/video/fluxfilm_01_paik.mpg
(this is the complete Zen for Film. Beware as it is slow to load)
http://www.stephenvitiello.com

REFERENCES

Stephen Vitiello is a sound and media artist. Originally from New York, he now resides in Richmond, VA where he is on the faculty of Kinetic Imaging at Virginia Commonwealth University. Stephen Vitiello’s sound installations have been exhibited internationally in solo exhibitions including The Project, NY and Galerie Almine Rech, Paris as well as in group exhibitions including the 2002 Whitney Biennial and Yanomami: Spirit of the Forest at the Cartier Foundation, Paris. CD releases include Bright and Dusty Things (New Albion Records) and Buffalo Bass Delay (Hallwalls). Stephen worked on and off with Nam June Paik from 1991-2002, at times focusing on Paik’s archive but also producing various works for video, installation and television.
A Calendar and Two Searches

Sowon Kwon

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This text addresses three recent works: Calendar, a sculptural installation made up of twelve looped animations that feature the repetitive, futile actions of an “average female” figure based on an ergonomic template; harlem cartoon which traces an online search in the form of a digital snapshot and giveaway postcard; and dong ghap which is also based on a web search -- and is part of an ongoing series of works in a range of media -- that ruminate on the confluence of personal and historical memory, uncanny cosmologies, and self-portraiture. All three works address the ways in which the “old” complicates the “new,” especially as our bodies, perception, and identities are increasingly submitted to and made (in)accessible through technology.

Figure 1 & 2. From series Average Female, Sowon Kwon, drawings on blueprints, about 1990.

If images could function epigraphically, these blueprints from about 1990 might serve that purpose for this paper. They are from the average female series, drawings and prints made using an ergonomic template of a standardized female figure whose proportions are derived from amassing statistical averages of body measurements. These templates are used by architects and designers to aid them in designing things like furniture, cars, the height of kitchen counters, etc. presumably for maximum comfort and/or efficiency.

Blueprints can deteriorate quickly. I was very attracted to the ephemerality of the material at the time, and also with the idea that blueprints signal a process. They are “working drawings” as architects call them, a transitional document that reveals an underlying structure, but is not the final or built form itself. These are small about 8 x 10 inches, but I also made some quite large.
Figure 3. From series *Average Female*, Sowon Kwon, drawings on blueprints, about 1990.

This blueprint is about 8’ square and is printed on linen, a chemical process using specially treated cloth and ammonia, which was a way of archiving blueprints before microfiche. It wasn’t easy finding printers using this process in the early 1990s, and now of course with CAD and digitization, it is completely outmoded. But even then I wanted to animate the figure as narratives came to mind. By the time I finally got to it, it was about ten years later, so I have to accept that sometimes things take a long time. Because I had a decent computer by then, I skipped over the film and animation stand stage:

[>] See QuickTime 1

This is called *Average Female (February)*. She takes 12 breaths, then loops.

CALENDAR

Figure 4. *Calender*, Sowon Kwon, installation at The Kitchen, 2005.
*Calendar* is the latest iteration of the *average female* series as installed at The Kitchen in Chelsea in spring 2005. It is comprised of 12 of these looped animations to reference the annual cycle of time. I think of *Calendar* as a kind flexible sculpture that can be shown on any combination totaling 12, of available A/V equipment ranging from television monitors and analog tape players to computer screens and digital compact disc systems. At the Kitchen I worked closely with the curator and the installation crew who were great about providing me with equipment ranging from the latest DVD decks, to mostly Sony monitors from the late 70s and early 80s that still worked great for my purposes, but had been shelved and literally gathering dust to make way for the demand for newer toys.

![Close-up of *Calendar*, Sowon Kwon, installation at The Kitchen, 2005.](image)

The piece became an assemblage of monitors and playback equipment piled together sort of Paik Nam June-style (Paik as sign or memory and not direct reference to his use of monitors as sculptural objects). But I also like the allusions to a store display (or maybe even a pawn shop) or the idea of just so much furniture, as TV sets can be in a home or domestic context. I also hoped that it would become a kind of condensed history and inventory of so called “prosumer” apparatuses for “new media” presentations at institutions like The Kitchen, as they continue to bridge the rapidly outmoded to the “state of the art.”

![Installation view of *Calendar*, Sowon Kwon, installation at The Kitchen, 2005.](image)

Perhaps another important thing to mention is the interest in the old minimalist idea of expanding the perceptual field from the object itself, to the spatial context, to the architecture of not the white cube here, but the black box as The Kitchen (at least at the time of my show).
was outfitted for performance and theatrical presentations. So I like working with the specificities of the site—physically, as well as socially and historically. I think for artists of my generation, The Kitchen’s formation marks an idealized moment—pioneering beginnings of performance, of video (so called new media then). So the piece and the show as a whole was a chance to consider some of the ramifications of ideas that motivated post-Minimalist and feminist American artists, many who were featured at The Kitchen: questioning the ideals of traditional media, the centrality of the body as a site of social and political inscription, and the focus on the phenomenological experience of the viewer.

![Figure 7. Calendar, Sowon Kwon, installation at The Kitchen, 2005.](image)

The animations were not synched, and there was no sound, just these repetitive actions fading in and out. I wanted it to be something like breathing. They were also black and white, new and old, slightly anachronistic. Here is one more “month”:

[››] See QuickTime 2

This also loops over and over. I think Calendar is also a kind of rumination on the fragility of identity, to use a nineties word, about how we perhaps disintegrate and reintegrate all the time.

HARLEM CARTOON SEARCH

To introduce the second work, I brought some images from about 1983 or so, even older than the blueprints:

![Figure 8. Fou, Sowon Kwon, sketch from about 1983.](image)
What I notice when I look at this etching, is like the previous animation, there is the importance of line, as well as an ambivalence or struggle with discourse, with words, with language. There is also the use of text with image and as image, the pictorializing of words, using words as a kind of texture or even atmosphere. I hope you'll also notice the cartoonish style, caricature almost (although I didn't think of them that way at the time).

Figure 9. Artaud, Sowon Kwon, xeroxed drawing from early 80's.

This is also from the early 80s, where I xeroxed a drawing, then xeroxed the xerox, etc., until the image transformed. It is an early example of an embrace of mechanical reproduction and my letting go of a certain kind of signature approach, by inviting the collaboration of the machine.

So keep that in mind: comics; text as image; the collaboration of the machine, as I show you the second "new" work entitled Harlem Cartoon Search

Figure 10. Harlem Cartoon Search, Sowon Kwon.

This project began with an invitation from a curator at The Studio Museum in Harlem to make a small public art project, a giveaway postcard about Harlem as part of their ongoing series "Harlem Postcards." I chose to document a search entailing a comic book store, street photography, basically, but then was compelled instead with the idea of a digital snapshot of an online search. So this is the postcard. Basically I typed in the words "harlem cartoon" and dutifully culled through the first 100 entries that the search engine returned. It's been carefully condensed and constructed, built up from the bottom to show something of the spirit of the search, if not the exact sequence or duration. I'll just point out a couple of things--I started with basketball manhwa or manga authored by a woman living in Tokyo. And I also found amazing
historical material. Most of us I hope have heard of the Harlem Renaissance, and people like Jacob Lawrence or Romare Bearden, but I had not known a thing about some of their contemporaries like Oliver W. Harrington, or Ted Shearer, or Chester Commodore, who in their time reached so many more people through their work in newspapers and weeklies.

DONG GHAP

Figure 11. Self-portrait, Sowon Kwon, oil painting, 1987.

This small oil painting from circa 1987 represents the last time I consciously made a self-portrait, this serves to introduce the last works I will discuss from a new series entitled dong ghap. I am tentatively calling the series self-portraiture, perhaps for lack of a better designation.

A desire to see or assess myself in as straightforward and matter-of-fact manner as possible, coincided with the almost accidental realization that 1963, the year of my birth, was also the publication date of Edward Ruscha’s Twenty Six Gasoline Stations, that quintessentially matter-of-fact book of black-and-white photographs of just that: 26 gasoline stations, along Route 66 from Los Angeles, where he had been living (and continues to live) to his parent’s home in Oklahoma City. Each station represented is also captioned with its location and the name of the oil company. Ruscha later made other books such as Some Small Fires (1964), Every Building on the Sunset Strip (1966), 34 Parking Lots in Los Angeles (1967), and so on, and Twenty Six Gasoline Stations should be seen in that context. It is a modestly scaled work physically, but considered by many to be a pioneering work of conceptual art, in that the idea for a book, the title actually, the words “twenty-six” and “gasoline” together came first. The execution was secondary. “I don’t even look at it as photography,” Ruscha has said, “They’re just images to fill a book.”

The publication year of this little book, 1963, also coincided with the year of the suicide of the American poet Sylvia Plath. Most people have heard something of the circumstances of her death. In 1963 on a cold February morning in London, after having completed what was to become another small but seminal volume of the 1960s, Ariel, Plath placed a tray of bread and milk by the beds of her sleeping children, sealed off their room, and lay her head down in her kitchen oven. Twenty six gasoline stations, gasoline asphyxiation. 1963. These two things happened while my mom was pregnant.

Here, I have to teach you a Korean word: dong ghap. There are many words in Korean that describe relationships between people that don’t translate just right into English, but in one dictionary, it says “dong” means same or together; and “ghap” means an order or sequence; and
dong ghap is used to describe people who are the same age. Everyone born in 1963 is my dong ghap, for example. Sylvia Plath and Donald Rumsfeld and Paik Nam Jun are dong ghap.

So these events of 1963 are “constellated” for me, which is an appropriate way to describe it, because not only does dong ghap mean you are the same age, but (in the lunar calendar scheme of things, although I’m no expert) it means literally that the same stars were configured in the sky in the same order.

To conclude, I show a very short Quicktime titled, 1963 Gasoline Search.

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Virtual Puppetry and the Process of Ritual

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_Yong-Shin-Gud_ ("Calling-Dragon-Spirit") is an interactive 3D-animation installation that has a virtual puppet mimicking the interactor’s voice and gestures. "Yong-Shin-Gud" is a Korean word for a special shamanism ritual that evokes the dragon spirit, hence combining spirituality and ritual with technology through interactive media performance.

_Yong-Shin-Gud_ integrates the VR space, real space of the installation, and the sound activated puppet, "Virtual Shaman," who symbolize the mediation and in-between states of the virtual and the real spaces, similar to the way in which Korean shamans are mediators between the spiritual heavenly and earthly worlds. The piece creates an intimate connection between the human-computer interaction (HCI), traditional puppetry, and shamanism ritual.

Sound that is captured into the microphone, such as musical instrument or storytelling motivates the mouth, body, and facial expression of 3D virtual puppet in real time to mirror the expressions and gestures of the interactor, who is metaphorically the puppeteer. This piece confuses the identities between the real puppeteer (interactor) and the virtual puppet (VR shaman) -- where the virtual puppet acts as if it is the real puppeteer and vice versa -- in this ongoing and cyclical real-time lip-syncing and refracted mirroring process of interactivity.

Figure 1. _Virtual Shaman_, sound activated VR puppet.
Figure 2. Puppet and puppeteer telling a story together.

[>] See QuickTime 1

There is something magical about the puppeteer and puppet merging as a single entity. The person who is interacting collaborates with the VR puppet in order to create the movement and sounds which occurs simultaneously on and off the screen. This performance is neither a solo or duet performance, rather it reflects the idea of the shaman (spirit) becoming one with its instrument (object).

**Interactive Technology and Ritual**

Interactivity is seen everywhere in contemporary life, in the arts, media culture, and society. Every individual influences the dynamic of continuous interactivity\(^1\) so there is significance in looking at what happens “in between” communications between disciplines, cultures, and societies. Especially today, computer technology brings attention to the world of interactivity due to the various interactive technologies that have been developed.

Looking back on human history however, the desire for interactivity existed in ritual and shamanism spaces as well. Thus there is an inherent connection between interaction and ritual communications, because the ritual act is driven by human instinct that transcends cultural and historical period. Ritual explains this fundamental human process of interaction and becoming, and it is interesting to bring the ritualistic sentiment and concerns back into the interaction of technology and man. My work *Yong-Shin-Gud* allows me to see the potential of working with interactive media as a new vehicle to carry out rituals, in the most basic level of communication.

In Eastern cultures, the form of ritual is understood through layers of complicated structure. Western and Eastern systems exhibit different relationships of control in interactivity. These differences have long reflected each culture’s identity and way of thought, also in understanding of interactive media.

Cartesian duality of the mind-body split has explicit hierarchy (mind over the body) and exists in the Western cyberspace paradigms. Yin/Yang duality also seems separate, but this binary is actually not a real binary nor hierarchical process, rather a composition of all things and events.\(^2\) Mind and body, female and male, night and day, moon and sun—they require each other, inspire each other, and exchange their positions in cycles. They act on strong inertia to join and become one. The symbol of Yin / Yang is divided into left and right, which suggests a mutual relationship and balance between two polar opposites without hierarchy.
“Moo,” a character in Chinese (character Moo comes from MooKyo, which means Shamanism), demonstrates the structure of Yin/Yang ritual. In this character, the human figure is represented as a mediator who dances between sky and earth. This mediator is the Shaman, the one who performs the ritual of interaction based on these two polar opposite components. Paradoxically, this ritual only exists in the separation even though its goal is to overcome the separation and become one. It is then the role of the shaman to blur the line between the binary pairs. Leaving and returning, fusion and separation, this continuous movement of two-way actions shapes our form of ritual, which is highly interactive and breaks down binary structures. This significant interactive process occurs all the time, from daily routines to sacred ceremonies. Hence, the ritual process has neither a beginning nor an end.

From the Physical to the Spiritual

Interactive technology has primarily been utilized as a physical device of control. It hasn’t sufficiently explored its potential as a true interactive medium. The tendency to focus on the physical aspect of interactive technology has lessened the conceptual space of interactivity to branch out, exploring possible spiritual connections that encompass both the physical and the mental components. Without our perceptions, our interactive experience can’t take place. The physical motive initiates this action but it is also our mental process that is experiencing the interactivity simultaneously. Hence, the interactive experience should not allow a mind/body split but rather imply how the Cartesian dualism is a complete metaphysical construct.

Although the audience’s interaction with my VR puppet may seem to start with simple physical interactions, the interactivity intensifies when the mirroring of the puppet and puppeteer’s break down the physical and mental barrier.

The Spiral of Interactivity

All forms and symbols of transformation spirals. It is the passage from one mode of being into another that represents cosmic rhythms of interaction and eternal becoming. The following steps indicate the procedure of the interactive spiraling.

1. Inter-coexistence 2. Inter-action 3. Inter-dependence 4. Inter-penetration

In these phases, interactive process goes from the inter-coexistence phase to the inter-penetration phase. Each binary opposition penetrates through a membrane into the other side and is transformed into its opponent. This is the ultimate stage of shamanic ritual and yin/yang, which evokes our primitive vital function of transformation.

The role of the Shaman is opening the communication of these phases. In Yong-Shin-Gud, the virtual puppet is the metaphor of the shaman that allows a spiraling interaction between the puppet/puppeteer, artwork/audience, virtuality/reality, and mind/body causing a break in the binary systems for a new perspective about interactive experience.
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Electricity plus Soviets: What is new about new media?

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I want to begin this paper with a disclaimer and an observation. The disclaimer is that I have never really been at all interested in what is called “new media” in art. On the other hand—and this is the observation—there is an area, sometimes called media activism, or independent media, that interests me a great deal and is never discussed as new media let alone discussed in the art context. So a lot of what I want to do is fight over the term “new media,” for better or for worse. I say for better or for worse, since I’m not sure that this latter category “wants to be discussed” or more important benefits from discussion in this context.

This paper has two claims to make on the level of theory. The first, in more familiar territory than the second, is aimed at exorcising the ghost of technodeterminism. It may seem as if that ghost had already been thoroughly exorcised, but in fact in not very subtle ways technodeterminism continues to inform much of what flies under the new media flag. Here, in my view, the key theorist is Armand Mattelart who has charted a history of how since the French Revolution people have invested hopes in the idea that technology, a technological device of some kind or other, would bring about positive social change.1 During the French Revolution, for example, great hopes were invested in the semaphore telegraph; the Saint-Simonians, on the other hand, cast their lot with the railroads.

I refer you to Armand Mattelart’s work for a more thorough analysis. However, cutting to the chase, one may instead go to V. I. Lenin’s famous equation: “Electricity plus soviets equals socialism.” Somehow, by a logic that I sometimes call “anything but politics” and has a particular tenacity in the context of new media, it is always the soviets—meaning the councils, the new social relations—that get left out of the equation these days. That is, in the field of new media we have only electricity. Or for electricity one may substitute microprocessors, fiber-optics, pixels. The revolution, or the kinds of revolution new media people have in mind, will not only be televised, television will produce it.

Now some may feel inclined to defend technology’s progressive agency by pointing out that for Marx a new field of productive relations characterizes any given historical epoch. This is an important observation. However, one should remember that a field of productive relations is not just technological but also includes a set of social relations. Technology is just one component of the field of productive relations that takes shape in any epoch, and these are vastly underdetermined by technology.

So much for the first theoretical point; the second, in less familiar territory, will be my truly last foray into the theorization of new media. Here I pursue a different if related direction in thought, and ask non-rhetorically: What do we mean by technology? Of course, there is a vast body of speculative thinking on this subject in which the towering figure, even if toweringly problematic for some, is Martin Heidegger. His The Question Concerning Technology is important, of course, but questions concerning technology haunt much of his later writing.
The possibility that this second direction of thought allows for is that, rather than simply reject technodeterminism, we might deconstruct or broaden the concept of technology. I think we should go into this area gingerly and should draw very selectively for our purposes from Heidegger’s questioning of technology, focusing on his deconstruction of assumed or anthropological notions of what technology is. For Heidegger the beginning point for his inquiry is the everyday understanding of technology as the instrumental, as a means to an end.2

Let us then follow Heidegger into the treacherous area of the Ancient Greek language. For the Greeks on the one side physis (nature) is a showing forth or coming into presence, an aletheia or revealing. He calls this revealing poiesis, inasmuch as it is a bringing forth. Techne properly understood, far from being the opposite of physis, is likewise a showing forth or a revealing. Technology and nature are thus both forms of poiesis, bringing forth.

In later times, disturbingly, technology becomes a form of setting-upon or challenging of nature. Nature is “set upon” by man of course, but when Heidegger wishes to stand back from this process he refers to a gathering of man into this mode of setting upon nature that he calls enframing. Enframing (Ge-stell) involves the human, though it is not a human decision. Or, it is a way humans are in the world. Thus, the ontological essence of technology is a way of being in the world. On enframing, Heidegger writes:

Thus when man, investigating, observing, ensnares nature as an area of his own conceiving, he has already been claimed by a way of revealing that challenges him to approach nature as an object of research, until even the object disappears into the objectlessness of standing-reserve.3

Since enframing concerns all of the human (inclusive of social and political organization and government) we might wonder now how technology came to be constricted to referring only to machines or devices. Again, Heidegger writes:

The assembly itself [Heidegger is referring to a machine], however, together with the aforementioned stockparts, falls within the sphere of technological activity; and this activity always merely responds to the challenge of Enframing, but it never comprises Enframing itself or brings it about.4

Under this deconstructed version—ontological understanding rather than anthropological in Heidegger’s terminology—our understanding of techne and the technological would include both of Lenin’s components for revolution, both sides of the field of productive relations that drives or shapes history.

Having set up these two options—either we reject technodeterminism or broaden the notion of technology to include, centrally, social relations—I want to return to the question of what should count as new media. In particular, I want to look at a selection of activist media groups and ask why the reworking of social relations through media activism that these groups practice is consistently called “independent” or “alternative,” while a chimerial new media is bestowed the epithet “new” in light of its merely machinic developments. In my view this conception of the new, which is aligned with the technodeterminism of new media, is basically counter-revolutionary. It says on some level: there will be no new society. (This is, by the way, the dilemma of Disney’s Tomorrowland where we have been told the “imagineers” had great difficulty imagining a very futuristic future based on new machines.)

Consider the media collective Aru in El Alto, Bolivia, or the community television station Catia TVe [www.catiatve.org.ve] operating out of western Caracas. Such initiatives did not come into being because someone—with new equipment—thought they would be exciting or self-aggrandizing to operate. Rather these initiatives were produced as a new set of social relations, out of a fundamental social and political struggle. In both the cases of Catia TVe and Aru, a kind of popular power that was emergent, and that essentially involved a reworking of political and social relations, needed its own “new” vehicle for communication. In the case of ViVe [www.vive.gob.ve], another channel in Venezuela, this social-political dimension is especially explicit since it was born following the 2002 coup attempt in Venezuela, out of the recognition that the media channels tied to the social formation of the bourgeoisie were basically and deeply counterrevolutionary. (In Venezuela the four principal TV channels are popularly known as the four riders of the apocalypse.) Like Catia TVe, ViVe has a central social dimension to its practice.
This practice is tied integrally to a vision of class struggle inasmuch as both channels propose to shift participation and access to the media to the Venezuelan people.

Regarding the Bolivian situation, I refer you to the writing of Claudia Espinoza Iturri. The situation is in some ways quite similar to the Venezuelan one. Here the indigenous social movements in El Alto and Cochabamba were deeply and fundamentally opposed to the social formations in league with transnational corporations that controlled the media. Espinoza Iturri points out how this real-world opposition operated bi-directionally: On the one hand, the bourgeois media for the most part could not see the Aymara organization taking shape at all; when the Aymara activists’ practices did enter the media’s focus the journalists systematically and violently misrepresented them. On the other hand, the Aymara activists were aware of this and prevented mainstream journalists—sometimes by force—from covering and misrepresenting their struggles.

The differences in the Bolivian and Venezuelan situations are important, but the important point is that in both cases a class struggle, a popular reworking of social relations on the part of an emergent group, produces a “new” mediatic device. This new mediatic device is as much of these new social relations as it involves any “exciting” technology. In fact, the technology is always secondary and merely instrumental.

Now one can see how—in a way many involved in these initiatives are completely aware of—it very much downplays the role of these media groups to call them independent or alternative. Are new chapters in class struggle simply “alternatives”? Is a shift of power into the hands of people and media organs that restore people’s voices merely “independent”? That seems to be the suggestion.

As against this suggestion, it seems to me clear that the mediatic and intellectual channels of the still empowered bourgeoisie are wholly devoid of intellectual and moral authority (this is what the Zapatistas have so effectively shown and played on). Arguably, it is these bourgeois channels that should be called “alternative”—in the sense of secondary—or something less than an alternative. Further one could say that they are independent in the sense of wayward or irresponsible. Of course, to say that a class has lost its intellectual and moral authority—since this is only half of hegemony—is not to say that it does not still need to be removed by force, or curtailed through revolutionary legislative measures as the Venezuelans have done.

By way of an arbitrary conclusion, since one could go on discussing militant media—the number of active groups is enormous and the phenomenon is global—I want to reemphasize that in the cases of Aru, Catia TVe, and ViVe what is new is the access, the participation, and the ownership of the means of production on a popular level that constitutes the organization’s “newness.” This is a notion of progress that is about a social and political program and quite fully in opposition to the isolation of people on the other ends of video-cell phones or Nintendo machines or their regimentation in front of plasma screens that corporations in league with control societies would seem to promote. The relevant technology here, and I believe our work in the direction of Heidegger’s line of thought helps us to say this, is the new set of social relations itself. This latter—that is, the “technology” of social and political organization—is the only productive kind of technological advance.

To sum up, I think it might be useful to draw up a typology of the new media. New media as it is usually understood gives great play to the technological, instantiating a form of technodeterminism while embodying regressive forms of social organization, in particular by subsuming “work” under the name of a protagonistic artist. By contrast, the other practices, namely the misnamed practices of independent media, instrumentalize technology, understood as the machinic, to a set of new or oppositional social relations. Through the technology of their social relations, these media groups signal a new chapter in class struggle and a new day characterized by the emergence of a multitude that speaks for itself.
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6 “Responsive” is a better description of such media groups. Here we may take our cue from the Venezuelan example—both the use of the idea of social responsibility in the case of the factories under co-gestion and the laws describing a socially responsible media in the Ley de Responsibilidad Social en Radio y Television (2004).
7 Lukács located a robust era of bourgeois letters in the 19th century around figures such as Balzac and Stendhal. Similarly, we may consider the possibility that a robust bourgeois-liberal media, the era when it was at least convincing, was the era of investigative reporting of the kind pursued by Bob Woodward and Seymour Hirsch, to take two representative examples. While it is too large a topic for this paper, I would argue that there are clear signs that this period—the period of the bourgeois mediatic hegemony (meaning its ability to represent itself as authoritative)—is definitively over. The emergence of a robust, effective, and massive militant media movement as well as the disconnect, even bafflement, of the mainstream media when faced with the social movements are important signs. At the same time and also telling, we can perceive how the liberal-bourgeois media is no longer even able to live up to its own purported virtues, such as “independence,” “integrity,” and “balance.” Upholding these ideals has become actually impossible for liberal advocates in the era of “embeddedness,” and of de facto alignment in all camps. While it is inevitable that many in the liberal bourgeois camp hope for a return to these virtues, the positions are no longer tenable. These terms operated during an era of bourgeois hegemony as reified universals and at that time they already, in spite of their claims to universality, instrumentalized for bourgeois aims: primarily that of preserving the status quo, but also fending off “corruption” dangerous to the bourgeois state. In the collapse of this hegemonic position—at least from the standpoint of intellectual authority if not yet from the standpoint of actual power—the terms have become once and for all impossible to uphold. Now the case of Aljazeera [english.aljazeera.net] is interesting in this regard since the station does—in spite of how it is represented in the US press—successfully operate within the liberal mandate of multi-sidedness and balance. Perhaps it is the last media organ to do so. Indeed a study should be made of the special conditions that allow the emergence of this last and quite convincing blooming of the liberal ideal.

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This short paper has two focuses. The first is the context and significance of new art forms, including multi-media art, in contemporary Chinese art. For example, why have these forms attracted experimental artists since the 1980s and 1990s? What do these artists want to achieve by using them? What are their contributions to contemporary art in general? The second focus is a major section in the 2006 Gwangju Biennale, for which I serve as Chief Curator. Entitled “Trace Roots,” this section intends to present and interpret contemporary art from a “diachronic” approach. I will explain why we have decided to take this approach and how we are using this approach to organize the section.

To understand the meaning of contemporary art forms in China, we need to consider these forms, such as installation, performance, video, site-specific art, and multi-media art, as a vital component of a global/local dialogue. This dialogue has been one of the most powerful driving forces for the development of Chinese experimental art since the 1980s: it has stimulated experimental artists to explore their self-identity, to expand their visual vocabulary, to make traditional Chinese concepts and forms part of global contemporary art, and to re-contextualize international art trends amid domestic concerns. The same dialogue has also made a significant contribution to international contemporary art, especially after the early 1990s when Chinese artists began frequenting large and small exhibitions abroad.

The conversation between Chinese artists and global art scenes did not start from the 1990s, of course. But for a long time it was equated with the Westernization of Chinese art. From the early twentieth century onward, many Chinese artists abandoned the traditional Chinese brush. Some traveled to Paris and Tokyo to study Western oil painting and sculpture first hand, but those who remained home also had ample opportunities to learn foreign art forms and techniques. The establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 did not stop this historical process, but restricted the model of academic learning to social realist art of the Soviet Union. For more than three decades this particular “Western” style dominated Chinese art, but it became history after experimental art grew into a national movement through the ’85 Art New Wave. Participants in this avant-garde movement embraced all brands of modern western art developed outside the canon of realism (including, for example, surrealism, Dadaism, abstract expressionism, conceptual art, body art, and Pop art). But perhaps more important than these individual styles, the introduction of new, contemporary art forms allowed young Chinese artists to bridge the gap between East and West, which had existed as a fundamental conceptual framework in which artists and historians envisioned modern Chinese art. In other words, these artists no longer had to make choice between oil and ink painting (and hence to choose a rigid identity as a “western-style” or a “Chinese-style” painter), but could develop a transnational artistic identity for themselves by adopting contemporary art forms.

They could do so because unlike oil and ink paintings, these contemporary art forms, such as installation, performance, and multi-media art, actually defy a rigid cultural identity. What
these forms provide to Chinese artists, as well as to artists from other non-Western counties, is an "international language," which not only confirms their own contemporaneity but also allows them to incorporate indigenous art forms, materials, and expression into contemporary art. This explains why their works can have both strong local references and international appeal, and why such works, while responding to regional history and memory, have also become regular components of Biennales and Triennials around the world.

I want to emphasize this point because the identity of Chinese experimental art has long been a contested issue. It is routinely caricatured by official Chinese critics as a local imitation of western contemporary art. Many Western critics actually hold a similar view. If they praise this art they tend to emphasize its political significance by calling it "unofficial" or "underground." Both views continue to frame experimental Chinese art within the East-West dichotomy, even though this art itself has transcended this dichotomy. If we examine the history of this art carefully, we find that from its beginning, Chinese experimental art was a branch of global contemporary art -- an identity determined not by where artists live but by the concepts and forms of their works and by their intended audience. The key to understanding these artists and their works is to discover how global-local experiences and perspectives were negotiated through specific art forms.

For example, one of the earliest multi-media works in contemporary Chinese art is a video/sound installation by the Beijing artist Wang Gongxin. Wang came to America in 1987 as a visiting artist in the State University of New York at Cortland and Albany, and afterwards took up residence in Brooklyn, New York. He didn't take a permanent residence in the United States, however. Starting from the early 1990s, he and his wife, artist Lin Tianmiao, embarked on a nomadic lifestyle, traveling between Beijing, New York and other international cities year round, while creating worked to convey their experience as global travelers. The installation, called Brooklyn's Sky, resulted from this desire (figure 1). It was inspired by an American folk belief that if a person dug a deep enough hole, he would emerge on the other side of the world in China. However, since Wang Gongxin is Chinese, he started his fantastic journey from Beijing, by digging a well in his small apartment there. At the bottom of the well he installed a small video monitor. As if looking through a transparent window, the visitor could see on the screen a piece of sky - the sky above Wang Gongxin's Brooklyn home.

I can list many other artists, whose choice of art forms helps them to express their experiences both as global and local artists. Zhang Dali, for example, became a graffiti artists in Bologna, Italy, and created thousands images of his self-portrait on Beijing's streets as his dialogue with the city after he returned to China in mid-1990s. He then transformed such site-specific images into photographs and videos for traveling exhibitions. The picture in figure 2 for example, appeared in an exhibition I co-curated in New Yorks' International Center for Photography and Asia Society Museum last year. Cai Guoqiang is another artist who has made the global/local dialogue a central theme of his art. Using the gunpowder invented by the ancient Chinese, he has staged "firework" installations and performance in many countries around the world, often combined with other art forms such as painting and video. In the ambitious project he undertook in China, called Extend the Great Wall of China by 10,000 Meters, he traveled along the Great Wall to its western limit. There, assisted by local people, he laid down a 10-kilometer-long fuse in the Gobi desert. Its simultaneous explosion created the spectacle of a "wall of fire," as if the Great Wall had suddenly come to life and grown to an unprecedented length (figure 3). In the First Guangzhou Triennial I curated in 2002, this work was represented by a long scroll painting and a video.
Figure 1. Wang Gongxin, *Brooklyn’s Sky, Digging a Hole in Beijing*, video installation, 1995.


Figure 3. Cai Guoqiang, *To Extend the Great Wall of China by 10,000 Meters, Project for the Aliens No. 10*, performance and video, 1993.
These examples lead me to the second topic of this paper, which is my plan for the First Chapter of the Sixth Gwangju Biennale, schedule to open in early September, 2006. This Biennale has a “bifurcate” structure, presenting and interpreting contemporary art from two complementary perspectives, one synchronic and the other diachronic. In my view, this structure has great potential to solve a serious problem in curating multi-national exhibitions, namely, how to retain the authenticity of non-western contemporary art, instead of “flattening” it to suit a preexisting art historical narrative and exhibition mode.

Here “flattening” means simultaneous conflation and growth: the depth is turned into horizontality; events and representations are reconfigured into lateral networks and synchronic relationships. Such transformation has its liberating effect, to be sure. One startling example is the rapid multiplication itself of biennales and triennials - even China has seen a dozen or so such exhibitions within its borders, all created in the past 5 years except for one. Organized and sponsored by provincial and municipal governments, official art institutions, private companies, philanthropists, and independent curators and artists, these events have only one thing in common: their emphasis on global connections and their penchant for being contemporary. As such they merge into an international system of art and commerce, to which they contribute heightened excitement and anxiety, generated not so much by the art itself but by the unprecedented transformation of an enormous country and its 1.3 billion people.

Regardless where a multi-national exhibition is held, in Venice or in Shanghai, it easily “flattens” the historical dimensions of a regional contemporary art through a simultaneous process of decontextualization and recontextualization – a process that resembles the act of collecting. The contemporaneity of a regional art is redefined as a suspended moment outside any historical narrative. In the case of contemporary Chinese art in such settings, while it is reframed within a global context, it nevertheless cannot be “inserted” into the existing history of modern and contemporary art because of its specific timing, inspirations, criteria, and context. This dilemma has further led to a particular perception of individual artists: because most non-western artists are automatically associated with their countries or regions, they too have become suspended. This is why those truly original artists actually suffer most from this perception: even though their works appear in numerous international exhibitions, they disappear in standard histories of contemporary art or are grouped into a separate, minor chapter.

These reflections lead to a practical, curatorial issue: How to “de-flatten” regional contemporary art in a multi-national exhibition. As the curators of such exhibitions, it is natural for us to search for the best artists and the newest works to realize a given curatorial project. My earlier reflections, however, raise questions about the implications of this practice in displacing, decontextualizing, and appropriating “regional” artists and their works. These questions cannot be answered by means of cultural preservation - the interaction of contemporary art in a global space is an irreversible trend and must constantly produce new meaning. To respond to these questions productively we need to reflect upon the existing models of multi-national art exhibitions; the goal is to bring artists from different parts of the world into a genuine artistic and intellectual exchange.

This goal is idealistic but not utopian. Many efforts can be made; a primary one would be to reintroduce the notion of “depth” into a multi-national exhibition. I believe that the “diachronic” approach of the Sixth Gwangju Biennale can help realize this goal. I define this approach as artists’ dialogues with histories and memories, and as their responses to previous aesthetic and visual languages. Since such dialogues and responses constitute important aspects of contemporary art in general and transcend regional boundaries, what unites or separates artists will be their artistic aspirations and strategies, not their birthplaces, residency, or ethnicity. Abandoning the conventional structure and elements of history of art, such as chronology, stylistic evolution, and linked events and artists, the exhibition will instead sort out concepts and paradigms which have been most essential to contemporary artists’ perception and imagination of the East.

Instead of producing a “counter narrative” of the prevailing chronicle of modern and contemporary art, therefore, this part of the Biennale will hopefully open up new spaces for historical imagination. Intersecting with a “synchronic” section that focuses on global networking and information technology, such a diachronic dimension will add three-dimensionality to a presentation of today’s art.
Wu Hung, Chief Curator of The First Chapter of the 6th Gwangju Biennale 2006 is an art historian, curator and writer. Dr. Wu is currently Harrie A. Vanderstappen Distinguished Service Professor in Chinese Art History at the University of Chicago, Director of the Center for the Art of East Asia, and Consulting Curator of the Smart Museum of Art. He was the Chief Curator of the First Guangzhou Triennial and his books include *Chinese Art at the Crossroads: Between Past and Future, Between East and West* (2002).
The 6th Gwangju Biennale 2006 from the Perspective of “Shift of Center”

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My presentation starts from discussion of Biennale not only as a possible device for cultural glocalism and cosmopolitanism but also as a new medium for global exchange and learning, and argues that the emergence of biennales in the 3rd world and non-western countries from the early 90’s is a “shift of center.” The 6th Gwangju Biennale exemplifies this contention.

1. Legitimacy of International Biennales

One of the phenomena characteristic of contemporary art scene is the proliferation of mega-size international exhibitions such as biennales. Biennales nowadays function as a stage where cutting-edge experimental arts, including installation, performance, media arts, are exposed as an alternative device to overcome any demerit and old habit of the conventional art world. By finding its significance in the aspect of the “international”, biennales provide and capture de-territorialized and nomadic quality of contemporary arts through works by cosmopolitan artists who are continuously on the move in various places of the world generating global ‘hypertext,’ and all the more suggest new visions for globalism that seeks for a possibility of co-existence for all human kind via global networking.

From the experience of past international events in the last half-century, we have realized that globalism is not a substitution for the local but a meaningful encounter between the world and a region, and thus globalism is bound to return to its original root in the end. The old understanding of globalism was based on the concept of changing underdeveloped countries to fit in the cultural and political standards set by the West. However, it is now conceived as “glocalism” whereby non-western countries expose themselves to the west and intervenes into its culture to extend their own cultural context to the world in a meaningful and intelligent way.

Artists who desire to be glocal seek for mutual evolution between the inside and the outside, the self and the other, the West and the non-West by combining their heritages and cultural peculiarities with new technology and with liberal approaches to grasp global languages along with those of their own, rather than taking a passive and exclusive attitude inclined to their racial and ethnic substance and regional values. Biennale is none other than a platform where such works are gathered in one place visualizing phenomena of hybrid, multi-centre, heterogeneity and multi-culture, thus become a new medium creating another opportunity of mutual exchange and networking.

2. Significance of Shift: from Western Biennales to Non-Western Biennales

International biennales rose to serve as a new impetus from the conceptual background of the third world’s discourses or post-colonialism that strive to overthrow old values by criticizing Neo-Imperialist attitude, and to politicize the experience of diaspora, migration, the other, periphery and replacement by realizing a new identity. In this context, the geographical shift from western
biennales to non-western, in particular to the Asia-Pacific region, implies a geo-political re-location of the center.

The Venice Biennale, initiated in 1895 as the first international biennale of the world, has been closely related to cultural and political hegemony and established a prototype of western centered international exhibitions featuring nation-based pavilions -- as if overcoming a country-based exhibition structure. The São Paulo Biennale, which started in 1951 and was initiated in the third world, shed a new light by introducing a new exhibition methodology focused on themes and concepts.

The Kassel Documenta, another representative contemporary art event of Europe, began in 1955 with an aspiration to redeem the past glory of German cultural tradition, and became an open ground for experiments of cutting-edge avant-garde arts with the involvement of Harald Szeemann. Besides the Kassel Documenta, the decennial Münster Sculpture Project (started in 1977) and the Berlin Biennale established to promote young artists in 1998 reveal Germany's enthusiasm to biennales. On the other hand France and the USA's interest in international biennales is rather passive. Given the fact that these leading countries in art and culture are not really keen on the necessity of international biennales, we may presume what fundamentally urges initiation of international biennales. In other words, contemporary biennales can be understood as a cultural/political device by non-mainstream countries in their efforts to uplift their national status by exposing their own art and culture through international stages, and establish a new identity that overcomes the residue of cultural colonialism with their will for decentralization and globalization.

It can be then understood as a natural phenomenon that non-western countries of the post colonial period have sought for re-arrangement of the hierarchy in the world's art and culture by setting up new biennales. Following the example of San Paolo Biennale, Indian Triennale (1968), Sydney Biennale(1973), Bangladesh Biennale (1981), Havana Biennale (1984), Istanbul Biennale (1987) were inaugurated, and from the 90's, Osaka Biennale (1990), Taipei Biennale (1992), Asia-Pacific Triennale (1993), Gwangju Biennale (1995), Shanghai Biennale (1996), Fukuoka Asian Triennale (1999), Yokohama Triennale (2001) and Guangzhou Biennale (2003), Singapore Biennale(2006) have appeared. The birth of such non-western biennales in the 80-90's manifests the post-colonial will for altering the world's cultural geography and hierarchy by globalizing local cultures through reciprocal exchanges and networking and re-locating the center from the West to the third world.

3. The 6th Gwangju Biennale 2006

Theme of Biennale

On considering the theme of the Biennale, my intention was to suggest a most topical and timely discourse in relation to the vibrant circumstance and dynamic change of contemporary Asia. With the theme of “Asia,” the Biennale could provide speculative discourses and aesthetics on Asia and undertake an investigation in the search for an Asian identity from the spectrum between substance and fantasy of Asia.1

The entity of Asia is gradually uncovered in the dynamics of international hierarchies that are constantly re-arranged and re-formed. Asia is now considered as a powerful economic community rather than a region for political conflicts, and is becoming the breeding ground for consumption and brand goods. Another prominent aspect of Asia, along with the globalist concept of economics that countervails its modernist political ideology, is the prosperity of urban culture and construction of new cities. Asian countries are joining the wave of modernization and globalization through construction of new cities that require for cultural revisions and new life styles. These rapid mutations of Asia towards new cities and contemporary nations, which can be observed through the examples of many cities that are going through urban development and transformation of cultural identity such as Gwangju, Seoul and Busan in Korea and Tokyo, Yokohama, Shanghai, Beijing and Hong Kong, reflect its will for contemporization.

Asia is on the move. It ceaselessly flows, refusing to be confined to a fixed identity, and expands beyond boundaries. It could be said that Asia as a unitary entity does not exist and only traces, fantasies and implications of Asia prevail. As Hong Kong action movies are quoted in Hollywood,
and again Hollywood movies are borrowed in the movies made in Hong Kong and Korea, Asia escapes its own boundaries and floats around the world as multiple signifiers of merchandise, culture, art, knowledge, information, marriage, travel, etc. A new fantasy for New Asia is founded from the phenomenon where change, reformation and the quality of flexibility and dynamism itself become the nature of Asia. This is not a fabricated fantasy from the westerners as the other, but a fantasy as a subversive illusion of the collective unconscious due to its indefinable quality, ambiguous boundary between reality and unreality and the fact that its substance and entity cannot be physically conceived.

Thus the title is “Fever Variations”, which alludes the cultural abundance and variety of Asia expanding to and affecting the world like a fever. The main goal of the biennale is to illuminate and re-interpret the world contemporary art from the standpoint of Asia that is currently going through such energetic changes and transformation.2

Exhibition Structure

The Biennale is composed of 2 bodies: the one is the two-chapter comprehensive exhibitions that will visualize the effects of this origin narrative as the main feature of the Biennale. The other is a citizen program and a special exhibition that will accompany the former. Titles of the two-chapter exhibitions are: “The First Chapter_Trace Root : Unfolding Asian Stories” and “The Last Chapter_Trace Route : Remapping Global Cities.”

“The First Chapter_Trace Root : Unfolding Asian Stories” takes a diachronic approach tracing back to the root of the Asian spirit in the context of contemporary art culture. This exhibition intends to track the process and procedure of the modernization and globalization of Asian art, in pursuit of re-locating its position in the global context and deconstructing the dichotomy between Western and Eastern arts. By interpreting the scope of Asian art beyond its regional, racial, and temporal definitions, the exhibition presents contemporary experimental paintings that blur the boundary between Eastern and Western styles, and also highlight the spirit of Asia immanent in Western avant-garde art. It strives to understand the historical stages of contemporary art and even to foretell its future prospects, illuminating the flow of exchanges and mutual influences between West and East.3

Whereas “The First Chapter_Trace Root” exhibition is organized in a way to show the epitome of the museum exhibition, “The Last Chapter_Trace Route” will feature a distinct characteristic of the biennale: anti-museum practice. Taking Asian cities as its theme to capture the phenomenon of Asia in process and on the move, the last chapter employs a synchronic method to network global simultaneity and concurrence, and traces their routes.

The last chapter, aiming not only for creativity but also for the generation of new discourses, plans to collaborate with various cultural institutions and the residency programs of alternative spaces in relevant cities with the goal of realizing a Mobile Residency Program.4 The primary objective of the Biennale, which seeks a symbiosis with Gwangju city's other cultural projects, actualizes through this project that thematizes CITY itself by stimulating alternative spaces that are both observers and symbiotic components of their cultures.

The last chapter will create global networks between some 15 cities in Asia, Europe and the Americas, the cities with major Asian immigrant communities actively synthesizing regional culture with Asian heritage. Cities in Asia, Middle East and the US start from Gwangju and Seoul networking other cities such Shanghai, Tokyo in Asia, Beirut, Syria in the Middle East, and New York and LA in the US. European cities comprise Paris, Berlin, Copenhagen, Amsterdam and Vilnius, whereas Latin American cities include La Paz, Buenos Aires, and Caracas.4

“The Third Sector_Citizen Program : 1.4 Million Torches” is designed as a scheme to link the Biennale to the citizens of Gwangju and the general public. This program accentuates the site-specificity of Gwangju while conceptually and practically joining to the two-chapter exhibitions. Lastly, a Special Exhibition titled “Color of East Asia” will further enrich the Biennale, while providing a contrast to the main exhibitions. It presents diverse items of traditional folk art, and everyday objects which represent the traditional world view of East Asia. Through the theme of color, this exhibition will help visitors focus on the variety and differences within traditional Asian visual culture.
3. Conclusion

What is expected from Asian biennales including Gwangju Biennale is international network which offers an opportunity to directly correspond and exchange information among neighboring countries. Asian countries have been previously familiarized to each other mainly through limited channels offered by the west, and thus eventually led to a non-democratic communication centering on the western context.5

Asian Biennales including the Gwangju Biennale purport to expand the cultural heritage of Asia and tie significance to the contemporary world and highlight its dynamic change beyond the conventional notion of Asia and narrow-minded Asia-centrism or nationalism. Stressing the power and dynamics of Asia on one hand, and encompassing universal issues beyond regional confines on the other hand, Asian Biennales will hopefully lay a foundation where Asia will be established as a possible new epicenter for the world’s contemporary culture.
Figure 3. Choi Jung-Wha.

Figure 4. Whang In-kie.

Figure 5. Kim Jong-ku
REFERENCES

1 The Gwangju Biennale was founded in 1995 for the purpose of promoting the city's cultural traditions and socio-political identity in the global context through art and culture. With a 10-year tradition, the Gwangju Biennale is now preparing for its 6th edition, aspiring to be a leading Biennale in Asia that will function as a center for contemporary art where new experiments are tried and novel artistic discourses are shared and exchanged.

2 It is also notable that the Gwangju Biennale 2006 stresses on the local characteristics and site-specificity of Gwangju city. The city of Gwangju, aspiring to be an Asian cultural hub city, will function as a geographic metaphor illustrating Asia's continuous change and dynamism. The dynamic relation between Gwangju and Asia is generated out of a narrative of 'from here,' whereby Gwangju reaches towards Asia and the world, and Asia and the world in turn gather in Gwangju.

3 Featuring 5 sections, tentatively titled “Myth and Fantasy,” “Nature and Body,” “Trace of Mind,” “History and Memory,” and “Past in Present,” which are to delve into Asian aesthetics and tradition of visual cultures reflected in works of artists, this exhibition will invite some 50 international artists including Lee Ufan, Michael Joo, Choi Jung-Wha, Whang In-kie, Kim Jong-ku, and some other artists from Korea. Works in various media and concept from the 60's Fluxus to the contemporary will manifest the thematic concept of the exhibition.

4 Starting from Gwangju and Seoul in Korea, this exhibition will create connections with other Northeast Asian cities as well as cities from other continents. The exhibition will invite some 50 international artists including Korean Park Chan-Kyong, Jo Seub, Flyingcity, Shin Ji-Cheol from Korea - to reside in relevant cities for a while to run workshops and on-site projects. The outcome will be finally shown at the Biennale exhibition.

5 Inventing hypertexts through inter-activity beyond territorial boundaries, the Asian network stimulates the economic demand of the “Hanryu (Korean Wave)” and enhances its cultural impact. The infrastructure of the “Hanryu” will be further stabilized by geographically and culturally expanding the network that has been already constructed. Considering that the “Hanryu” effect might fall into declination unless supported by strong and consistent strategies, the cultural event such as biennale will be able to suggest a way to strengthen the “Hanryu” through its exemplary practices of tracing root and networking route as exemplified in the 6th edition of Gwangju Biennale.

The URL for the Gwangju Biennale 2006 is http://www.gb.or.kr

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Call for Papers

Art in the Age of Technological Seduction

Fall edition 2006  
DEADLINE JULY 30, 2006

The “Art in the Age of Technological Seduction” issue of Media-N is a collaborative platform, a diverse questioning, re-considering and re-imaging of what, when and how new media arts practice is viewed by artists, practitioners, theorists, critics and historians working in the field today. We seek a broad range of contributions discussing the scope, values, and definitions of diverse new media arts practices and hope that this issue of Media-N will be a departure as much as much as an arrival. Four general questions have been posed by the members of the new media caucus as points of entry for an engaging, vibrant discussion.

The issue will be divided into two sections: The first section invites brief personal accounts and anecdotal responses addressing and/or expanding one of the four questions, and we encourage everyone to respond to this section, as we’d like to include as many responses as possible. The second section invites papers that address these questions in a more lengthy and detailed form.

FOUR QUESTIONS

1. Defining and Re-imagining  
What are new media arts? Is it necessary that we define new media arts? How do we begin to discuss or teach new media arts? What sets new media arts apart from other disciplines or practices, or what connects them? What's (still) new about new media or what was, if anything ever was? What defines your work as new media art and why? How do you explain new media arts to your students and colleagues? What did or currently does attract you to new media arts practices?

2. Discourses on New Media Arts: What do the discourses do to the practice?  
How might one describe or define the discourse/s on new media arts? How does new media arts discourse relate to new media practices? In other words, what does the discourse/s do or attempt to do to new media arts? Are theory and practice being brought together in new media arts discourse, and if not, how might we begin to do so? What do you find interesting or problematic about new media arts discourses? Do you think there is a disjuncture between new media arts practice and the discourses on it? As a new media artist, do new media arts discourses affect your practice?

3. Authorship, Relationships & Relationality  
Does your work maintain a traditional relationship between the artist/author/producer and the spectator/viewer? If not, how does it transgress these boundaries? Do you feel it necessary to challenge these boundaries? Do you consider relationality, the non-hierarchical intertwining of data, artwork, artists, and viewers etc., an important aspect of your work? In what context/s is your work shown and how does it effect it? How do recombinatory practices commonly found in new media such as sampling, appropriation, and mash-ups, challenge traditional author/viewer conventions? While autonomy and relationality have long lineages in art history, how do they function within new media arts practices and discourses?
4. E-litism: Technospheres and the Everyday

How do notions of location, language, identity, and cultural understandings of communication inform or effect new media practices? Who is left out of, disproportionately under-represented, in the world of new media art practices? Is, as some have argued, the openness often associated with information technologies and new media practices, paradoxically, replacing the national politics of a past with the global connectivity of cosmopolitan tourism? How does your particular specificity (sexual, gender, ethnic, racial, class) affect your practice, your work or its reception?

Event reviews
The editorial board also invites proposals for reviews of exhibitions/events/festivals/conferences, etc.

- Submission deadline: July 30, 2006
- Paper format and media format are in the ‘Submission Guidelines’ link
- Media-N author’s agreement is available from the ‘Copyright Statement’ link
- Send manuscripts via email to: Legier Biederman (lbiederm@ucla.edu)
- Questions: contact guest editors Legier Biederman (lbiederm@ucla.edu) or Joshua Callaghan (joshua@joshuacallaghan.com)