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The Color of Time

Video Sculpture by

Nam June Paik

Rose Art Museum

Opening reception with the artist Thursday, September 6, 1984 from 6:00 - 8:30 pm

Brandeis University
Waltham, Massachusetts

Free and open to the public

On the same evening, the Rose will commemorate its historic 1970 museum premiere of video art, *Vision and Television*:

6:00 - 6:30 pm
"Moon Shuttle: Life with Nam June Paik"
talk by Russell Connor, organizer of the 1970 exhibition, currently painter and head of public education, Whitney Museum of American Art

Pollack Fine Arts Teaching Center (next to museum)

6:30 - 8:30 pm
Charlotte Moorman, experimental musician and interpreter of Paik's work will perform *TV Bra for Living Sculpture* as well as *Concerto for TV Cello and Video Tapes*

Rose Art Museum

This exhibition has been made possible through the generous support of the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities NEW WORKS program, Crimson Video Systems and Sony Corporation of America.

Exhibition dates:

September 6 - October 14, 1984

Museum hours:

Tuesday to Sunday, 1:00 - 5:00 pm, closed Mondays and holidays

Group tours available
647-2402

Also on September 6 from 5:00 to 7:00 pm at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, B.S.O. and Beyond, a new installation by Paik. This invitation admits two to the ICA. Additionally, WGBH-TV will air a retrospective series of Paik's programs for broadcast. Check local listings for times.

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NEW YORK, N.Y.
TIMES
D. 873,255—S. 1,430,358
NEW YORK CITY METROPOLITAN AREA

APR 25 1982

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DEO ART'S GURU

By D. C. Denison

Seventeen television sets hang from the ceiling in Nam June Paik's loft in lower Manhattan; another 24, standing on their sides, line the wall. And there are perhaps 40 more sets scattered around this drafty fifth-floor atelier. Many of them have had their circuitry rewired or their broadcast signals manipulated to suit Paik's esthetic aims; a few, clustered in a corner and surrounded by electrician's tape and coaxial cable, are missing their back panels: works in progress by the man who for almost 20 years has been considered the pre-eminent video artist in the United States and Europe.

On a recent Sunday evening, when Paik, dressed in a style that can best be described as disheveled, is host to a reception for two visiting French video artists, the scene resembles nothing so much as a television-repair shop that is running three months behind schedule.

Very few of the guests that evening appear to be surprised by the surroundings. Many of those present have already seen these same television sets in European galleries and museums. Later in the evening, some of them even make requests.

Eventually, Paik obliges by turning on small groups of sets. The effect is difficult to categorize: One multimonitor collection features quick cutaway shots of soaring airplanes and tropical fish juxtaposed with abstract washes of neon-bright color. The 24 sets along the wall, however, have been tampered with to the opposite effect. These televisions, 12 of which Paik purchased at a hotel-renovation sale last year, have been altered in a way that reduces their broadcast signals to an elegant pattern of simple, stationary bars of electronic light.

As he turns these collections on, Paik offers surprisingly little in the way of commentary or explanation. A slightly built, shy man, he appears to find everything, even his own work, somewhat amusing. As he turns on the 17 sets that hang suspended from the ceiling, his comment, in his aphoristic, Korean-inflected English, is characteristically oblique: "Ceiling, I think, is the last undeveloped interior space in Manhattan." He points up to an energetic videotape collage of a dancing Merce Cunningham, a gesturing John Cage and abstract waves of color. "Also notice that electronic motion, unlike mechanical motion, has no gravity."

Nam June Paik has always been an unlikely — and quite disarming — 20th-century media figure. A tenacious student of Zen Buddhism who neither smokes nor drinks, Paik does not drive a car, has yet to buy a stereo and has remained almost totally uninterested in broadcast television. None of the more than 100 television sets in his loft are hooked up to an antenna. Yet Paik's admirers consider him an artistic video pioneer of the first rank, sort of a cross between Roone Arledge and Marcel Duchamp. Most probably agree with the influential French film journal Cahiers du Cinéma, whose cover story on Paik described his work as "*toujours amusants, souvent beaux, quelquefois sublimes.*"

That estimation is far from unanimous, however. Some critics are decidedly less tolerant of Paik's futuristic declarations and wild Dadaist tendencies; others still regard him as a minor artist, a specialist working in a medium of dubious esthetic significance. "Mr. Paik's pronouncements abound in exaggerated promises his art shows no evidence of keeping," wrote the former New York Times art critic Hilton Kramer in 1974 in a review of one of Paik's many well-attended exhibits at a midtown gallery. "The art one actually experiences is rather modest; its delights are flickering, small-scale and fragmentary, and quickly dissipated."

All of which should make Paik's major restrospective, opening this Friday at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, a lively, and possibly controversial, event. The Whitney show is also significant in that it represents the first time a major museum has honored a video artist with a retrospective.

At the reception in Paik's loft, many of those present expressed the hope that the show would bring video art into the art-world mainstream. Characteristically, Paik himself is not so sure that is where it belongs. "I think video art is half in the art world and half out," he said at one point in the evening. Then, turning over a nearby technical diagram, he drew two overlapping circles in pencil, labeling one "ART" and the other "INFORMATION." He pointed to their common area, filling it in with his pencil. "I think I am here," he said.

Television images are produced when charged electrons strike the interior, phosphor-coated surface of a cathode-ray tube. In 1962, Nam June Paik, then a young avant-garde musician, bought 13 secondhand television sets and spent about a year in his studio in Cologne, Germany, exploring ways to manipulate these charged particles. Eventually, by interfering with the cathode-ray tube's electromagnetic field, he was able to splash these electrons against the screen in patterns that were unfamiliar and evocative. The following year, when Paik exhibited these electronically doctored sets at the Galerie Parnass in Wuppertal, West Germany, the term "video art" formally entered the esthetic vocabulary.

Nearly 20 years later, "video art" still elicits quizzical looks. The vast majority of the work remains largely inaccessible to the general public; certainly very little of it reaches the living-room tube. Yet recently, there has been a definite rise in interest in video art, particularly among eager video students at colleges and universities. The Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum both run active video-art programs. The Kitchen in Manhattan, perhaps video art's liveliest showcase, screens videotapes by up to 10 artists a month in its viewing room. Elsewhere, media centers like the Boston Film/Video Foundation and San Francisco's Video Free America have also become established and productive.

Unlike the first generation of video artists, who were primarily sculptors and painters and simply dabbled in the new medium, many of the artists whose work is currently exhibited at these galleries are members of the so-called TV Generation. (One of the best-known of these emerging video artists, Bill Viola, described his youth in New York as a "seven-channel childhood.")

Video art matters to these young practitioners because it attempts to explore the expressive possibilities of a medium that has grown so powerful and pervasive during their lifetime. The challenge implied in all video art is not only the attempt to change the viewer's perception of the cathode-ray tube, to cause people to see it as something other than simply a tool for delivering large audiences to advertisers, but also to provide an interpretation of the world in the context of a massive communication explosion. Today, many art students regard television as an attractive and still largely unexplored artistic frontier.

Paik's influence on this second generation of video artists is palpable. Last year, when the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Council for the Arts invited Paik to the school for a series of workshops and a lecture, it was a major event. "We had the largest crowd we've ever had for a film-video event," said Benjamin Bergery, a lecturer at M.I.T. "There was a definite sense that people were coming to see the master." And last December, when Paik made a similar appearance at Video Free America in San Francisco, the crowd was so large that many had to watch the lecture on, appropriately enough, a tele-

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In his SoHo loft, Paik perches in front of a pyramid of televisions that paint a towering self-portrait. His best pieces are a deft combination of visual innovation and ironic commentary.

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count 2

Twenty years after Nam June Paik inaugurated an art form by tinkering with the innards of television sets to create unprecedented images, he is being honored with a retrospective at the Whitney Museum. While his work is still controversial, few deny that this P. T. Barnum of the avant-garde has brought a new perspective to television.

VIDEO ART'S GURU

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Seventeen television sets hang from the ceiling in Nam June Paik's loft in lower Manhattan; another 24, standing on their sides, line the wall. And there are perhaps 40 more sets scattered around this drafty fifth-floor atelier. Many of them have had their circuitry rewired or their broadcast signals manipulated to suit Paik's esthetic aims; a few, clustered in a corner and surrounded by electrician's tape and coaxial cable, are missing their back panels: works in progress by the man who for almost 20 years has been considered the pre-eminent video artist in the United States and Europe.

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vision monitor in an adjoining room.

There are a number of reasons for Paik's pre-eminent position in the small world of video art. For one thing, though he has always worked in a medium that is essentially corporate in nature, he has succeeded in developing his own unmistakable personal approach to television, which puts standard video fare into a new perspective. The subject of Paik's art — global communication, television technology — has also hit home with a growing audience looking for a new slant on the television age. And while many of his less successful projects degenerate into anarchistic silliness, it is this combination of visual innovation and ironic commentary that distinguishes his best work. "The importance of Nam June Paik's work comes from the fact that he's always working on two or three levels," according to David Loxton, the director of WNET's Television Laboratory. "Many of his works are visually stunning, but they are more than that, because frequently he uses his work to make a comment on the television medium itself. This gives his art a richness that is lacking in a great deal of video art."

Finally, Paik's popularity owes something to the fact that in a field that has already earned a reputation for boring self-indulgence, he is a colorful and exotic character, an avant-garde P. T. Barnum whose work is both lively and provocative.

Paik has more than just entertainment in mind, of course. Before he began working in video art, Paik was already well known in Europe as an avant-garde composer and a "cultural terrorist"; his performances, many of them with an alliance of artists known as Fluxus, were notable for their extravagant conceits (a 1959 performance, for example, featured an audio-tape collage that juxtaposed Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2 in C minor with lottery announcements and recordings of Japanese toy cars; the stage props included smashed glass, tin boxes full of stones, an upended grand piano, eggs, a live hen and a motorcycle). Paik's video art is based on the same anarchist, Dadaist impulses, and while his pieces are not specifically designed to be funny (though Paik — and just about everybody else — is inclined to laugh when they are discussed), they have provided a refreshing change from the pompous esthetics that have frequently dominated video art.

Paik's wild irreverence is probably also responsible for his relative success on broadcast television, where his work has appeared more often than any other video artist's. His first commission came in 1968, when Paik, along with five other artists, was invited to WGBH, the public broadcasting station in Boston, to work on a program about experimental artists, "The Medium Is the Medium." "Each artist had one day in the studio to make a seven-minute tape," Fred Barzyk, one of the show's directors, recalls. "Nam June arrived on his day with a small truck loaded with old TV's. He set them up in the studio and put on a pair of rubber gloves and a huge pair of rubber boots — supposedly to prevent shock. Then he began manipulating the sets from behind, sparks flying, as the most amazing images appeared on the screens. And the entire time he was doing this, he'd be instructing the cameramen, 'O.K., get this! Get this!' "

Later in the day, Paik mixed these abstract images with videotapes of a nude go-go dancer, a visually manipulated campaign speech by President Richard M. Nixon and shots of perfect strangers whom he had invited in off the street. The soundtrack was Beethoven's "Moonlight" Sonata. The resulting piece, entitled "Electronic Opera No. 1," convinced Barzyk and his colleagues that Nam June Paik was just what the broadcast-television industry needed. Since then, Paik has continued to work at broadcast stations (specifically WGBH and WNET in New York), where he has produced some of his best work.

Many of his accomplishments have been technical in nature. For example, Paik spent a year at WGBH, as an "artist in residence," constructing (with a Japanese engineer, Shuya Abe) the first videosynthesizer ever used on broadcast television. The Paik-Abe videosynthesizer, as it has come to be called, is a sort of mixing machine, controlled by a console of knobs, switches and dials, that allows the operator to combine images (some of them deliberately distorted) from a number of television cameras with splashes of bright color and electronically produced patterns and configurations.

Paik has also continued to use broadcast stations for his antiformalist assaults on the medium. In one — produced by the Boston Symphony Orchestra in collaboration with WGBH — he was asked to provide visual accompaniment for a program of symphonic highlights. Paik's contribution, a movement from

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Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 4 in G major, begins with lyrical, videosynthesized patterns of color alternating with shots of the orchestra's string section. Then, a few minutes into the piece, a bust of Beethoven appears briefly; minutes later, it appears again, electronically distorted; finally, a hand enters the picture and begins slapping the bust, rocking Beethoven's grim image from side to side. As the movement draws to a close, a grand piano fills the screen and catches fire. On the last note of the piece, it falls over.

Symphony trustees later learned the piano was a toy that was shot in close-ups, but they remained far from pleased. "It was not exactly what they had in mind," one WGBH producer recalls.

"People often laugh when they talk about Nam June," Fred Barzyk says, "but he really is quite a good thinker. I know he changed the way we at 'GBH thought about television."

"Paik is also a very clever politician," Barzyk adds. "He can talk to engineers, station vice presidents and grant makers better than almost anyone I've seen. He's subtly charming; you end up giving him everything. He's also quite a pamphleteer — he keeps in touch." At this, Barsyck opens a desk drawer and pulls out a stack of perhaps 30 postcards. (Almost everyone who has worked with Paik has a similar collection.) "If I kept all the cards he sent me, I'm sure I'd have over a hundred," he says.

□

"Nam June Paik Edited for Television," a half-hour show broadcast on WNET-TV in 1975, gave viewers a chance to catch up on Paik's 10 years of work in the United States. It was also an opportunity for Calvin Tomkins, an art critic for The New Yorker, to observe Paik's methods. Tomkins accompanied the program's host, Russell Connor, on an interview with Paik at his loft. Soon after they arrived, Tomkins recalls, Paik, wearing a large plaid cap, climbed up on a wooden scaffolding. "The scaffolding sort of set the tone for the interview," says Tomkins, who, along with Connor, joined Paik on his perch, "and I think that it was all very conscious on Paik's part. He wants to give things a spin, a twist, and he sets things up so that will happen."

Tomkins does not think, however, that Paik's puckish sense of humor detracts from his work or its critical reception. "Nam June's wildness, his sense of humor, is actually very refreshing," he says. "A good many American artists tend to be awfully self-important, very serious about their work. Paik is entertaining, which is kind of a bad word in formalist art circles — it's like the word 'decorative' — but people realize that Paik is really quite extraordinary, both as an artist and as a technician. His things are something quite apart from entertainment. . . . To my mind, he's the only one of the video artists I've seen who has thought through the implications of the medium and acted on his thinking. He's also, of course, a very appealing character — very hard to resist — even if you understand only every eighth word."

□

Nam June Paik saw his first television set in a downtown Tokyo department store in 1952. He does not remember being impressed with the new invention. At the time, he was 20 years old; two years earlier, he had escaped with his family from war-ravaged Seoul, South Korea, where he was born. His father had owned two factories but lost them both in the conflict. Soon afterward, they fled to Tokyo.

In Korea, Paik had studied classical piano and composition, but World War II and the impending Korean War made it difficult to pursue his interest in 20th-century Western music. "It took me three years to find one Schönberg record," he says, recalling his adolescence in Korea. Once in Tokyo, however, Paik was quick to take advantage of the situation. He enrolled in the University of Tokyo in 1952; four years later, he graduated with a degree in esthetics (his thesis topic: Arnold Schönberg).

In 1956, Paik traveled to Germany. Two years later, he settled in Cologne, then a center of avant-garde music. Soon he received a commission to work at the Studio for Electronic Music, where Karlheinz Stockhausen and others were experimenting with electronic means of composition. Before long, Paik himself began incorporating elements of electronic music into his work. His approach to music took an abrupt turn, however, in 1958, when he met the American composer John Cage, who was traveling through Germany on a concert and lecture tour. Cage surprised Paik by announcing that electronic music — as it was then — was "dead as a doornail" and that the future direction of music was toward theater. Paik, who had seen his share of dozing audiences at electronic music concerts, agreed. "I saw the

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VIDEO ART

Continued from Page 58

limits of electronic music," he says, "and I wanted to expand electronic music to include electronic visions."

For the next few years, while continuing to experiment with electronics, Paik embarked on a series of avant-garde performances in galleries, museums and concert halls in Düsseldorf, Cologne and Stockholm. Probably the most frequently recounted work of this period is "Etude for Pianoforte." The performance, which took place in a studio in Cologne, began normally enough with Paik playing Chopin on the piano. It ended a few minutes later, when Paik jumped off the stage to where John Cage was sitting with the pianist David Tudor and Karlheinz Stockhausen, produced a pair of scissors, cut off Cage's tie at the knot, poured a bottle of shampoo over Cage and Tudor (Stockhausen was spared) and then forced his way through the crowd and out the door. A few moments later, a telephone rang in the front of the room. It was Paik calling from the bar downstairs, announcing the end of the concert.

Performances such as these, which caused one German music critic to label Paik "the world's most famous bad pianist," surprised even Cage, who wrote soon after that Paik's "work, conversation, performances, daily doings never cease by turn to amaze, delight, shock and even terrify me."

Paik arrived in New York for the first time in 1964, and almost immediately made his presence felt by staging a number of avant-garde performances that included music, nudity, television technology and a large, jury-rigged robot of his own design, Robot K-456. In most cases, the music — and the nudity — was provided by Charlotte Moorman, a young cellist and well-known interpreter of avant-garde music who, after overcoming her initial shock, assisted in Paik's plans to bring sex to music. "Sex is major theme in art and literature," Paik explains. "Why not in music?"

Paik's first show, at the New School for Social Research, was typical of those that followed. It included a number of color-television experiments, Paik's Robot K-456, a few sculptural pieces and the premiere of Paik's first work for Miss Moorman, "Cello Sonata No. 1 for Adults Only." Miss Moorman appeared in an evening gown and played a few measures of Bach's Third Cello Suite, then stopped and removed an article of clothing. She played a few more measures, stopped again and removed another article of clothing. The piece continued in this fashion until she was almost completely nude.

The review in the next day's New York Herald Tribune began: "There were some strange doings last night at the New School. . . ." (Three years later, Miss Moorman was arrested for indecent exposure during her performance of Paik's "Opera Sextronique." She was convicted in a highly publicized trial and given a suspended sentence.)

In 1965, the Galeria Bonino on 57th Street in Manhattan gave Paik a one-man show of his "electronic art," the first in a series of five he would have at the gallery during the next 11 years. "Nam June's shows were always very experimental," Fernanda Bonino recalled recently. "It was always very messy — wires everywhere — and something was always breaking down. Most of the time, Nam June used to sleep under a table in the back room, so he could attend to the pieces. Whenever he had a show, it always looked like there was some sort of happening or performance going on, but it was just Nam June."

Critical reaction to these shows was surprisingly favorable. John Canaday, then The New York Times's art critic, wrote an enthusiastic review of one of Paik's first shows at the Bonino Gallery. He described Paik as the "John Cage of the ordinary domestic TV set," and went on to say that "the exhibition has unquestioned fascination and probable potential for expansion."

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Despite his popularity, Paik does not come even close to earning a living from his tapes. He estimates his share from rentals and sales of his work at about $3,000 a year, which means that, like most video artists, he has to make his money in other ways. His main source of income at this point is his professorship at the Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf, Germany, where he spends a few months every year. The Akademie (where his long-time friend and associate Joseph Beuys, the German avant-garde artist, is a fellow faculty member) pays Paik in the vicinity of $20,000 to $25,000 a year. Though the public and private grants he managed to garner in the 1970's are drying up, Paik now supplements his income with an occasional three- or four-day workshop at a university or media center.

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Sitting under those hanging television sets, Paik ponders the future of video art; he draws a familiar analogy. "Now video art is at the stage that photography was at in the 1930's and 40's," he says. "At that time, it was recognized as an art form by many, but high-art collectors had not been found. So photographers worked in the commercial area. Many video artists are also working in the commercial area now, but I think that could change in the future."

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Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 4 in G major, begins with lyrical, videosynthesized patterns of color alternating with shots of the orchestra's string section. Then, a few minutes into the piece, a bust of Beethoven appears briefly; minutes later, it appears again, electronically distorted; finally, a hand enters the picture and begins slapping the bust, rocking Beethoven's grim image from side to side. As the movement draws to a close, a grand piano fills the screen and catches fire. On the last note of the piece, it falls over.

Symphony trustees later learned the piano was a toy that was shot in close-ups, but they remained far from pleased. "It was not exactly what they had in mind," one WGBH producer recalls.

"People often laugh when they talk about Nam June," Fred Barzyk says, "but he really is quite a good thinker. I know he changed the way we at 'GBH thought about television."

"Paik is also a very clever politician," Barzyk adds. "He can talk to engineers, station vice presidents and grant makers better than almost anyone I've seen. He's subtly charming; you end up giving him everything. He's also quite a pamphleteer — he keeps in touch." At this, Barsyck opens a desk drawer and pulls out a stack of perhaps 30 postcards. (Almost everyone who has worked with Paik has a similar collection.) "If I kept all the cards he sent me, I'm sure I'd have over a hundred," he says.

□

"Nam June Paik Edited for Television," a half-hour show broadcast on WNET-TV in 1975, gave viewers a chance to catch up on Paik's 10 years of work in the United States. It was also an opportunity for Calvin Tomkins, an art critic for The New Yorker, to observe Paik's methods. Tomkins accompanied the program's host, Russell Connor, on an interview with Paik at his loft. Soon after they arrived, Tomkins recalls, Paik, wearing a large plaid cap, climbed up on a wooden scaffolding. "The scaffolding sort of set the tone for the interview," says Tomkins, who, along with Connor, joined Paik on his perch, "and I think that it was all very conscious on Paik's part. He wants to give things a spin, a twist, and he sets things up so that will happen."

Tomkins does not think, however, that Paik's puckish sense of humor detracts from his work or its critical reception. "Nam June's wildness, his sense of humor, is actually very refreshing," he says. "A good many American artists tend to be awfully self-important, very serious about their work. Paik is entertaining, which is kind of a bad word in formalist art circles — it's like the word 'decorative' — but people realize that Paik is really quite extraordinary, both as an artist and as a technician. His things are something quite apart from entertainment. . . . To my mind, he's the only one of the video artists I've seen who has thought through the implications of the medium and acted on his thinking. He's also, of course, a very appealing character — very hard to resist — even if you understand only every eighth word."

□

Nam June Paik saw his first television set in a downtown Tokyo department store in 1952. He does not remember being impressed with the new invention. At the time, he was 20 years old; two years earlier, he had escaped with his family from war-ravaged Seoul, South Korea, where he was born. His father had owned two factories but lost them both in the conflict. Soon afterward, they fled to Tokyo.

In Korea, Paik had studied classical piano and composition, but World War II and the impending Korean War made it difficult to pursue his interest in 20th-century Western music. "It took me three years to find one Schönberg record," he says, recalling his adolescence in Korea. Once in Tokyo, however, Paik was quick to take advantage of the situation. He enrolled in the University of Tokyo in 1952; four years later, he graduated with a degree in esthetics (his thesis topic: Arnold Schönberg).

In 1956, Paik traveled to Germany. Two years later, he settled in Cologne, then a center of avant-garde music. Soon he received a commission to work at the Studio for Electronic Music, where Karlheinz Stockhausen and others were experimenting with electronic means of composition. Before long, Paik himself began incorporating elements of electronic music into his work. His approach to music took an abrupt turn, however, in 1958, when he met the American composer John Cage, who was traveling through Germany on a concert and lecture tour. Cage surprised Paik by announcing that electronic music — as it was then — was "dead as a doornail" and that the future direction of music was toward theater. Paik, who had seen his share of dozing audiences at electronic music concerts, agreed. "I saw the

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VIDEO ART

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limits of electronic music," he says, "and I wanted to expand electronic music to include electronic visions."

For the next few years, while continuing to experiment with electronics, Paik embarked on a series of avant-garde performances in galleries, museums and concert halls in Düsseldorf, Cologne and Stockholm. Probably the most frequently recounted work of this period is "Etude for Pianoforte." The performance, which took place in a studio in Cologne, began normally enough with Paik playing Chopin on the piano. It ended a few minutes later, when Paik jumped off the stage to where John Cage was sitting with the pianist David Tudor and Karlheinz Stockhausen, produced a pair of scissors, cut off Cage's tie at the knot, poured a bottle of shampoo over Cage and Tudor (Stockhausen was spared) and then forced his way through the crowd and out the door. A few moments later, a telephone rang in the front of the room. It was Paik calling from the bar downstairs, announcing the end of the concert.

Performances such as these, which caused one German music critic to label Paik "the world's most famous bad pianist," surprised even Cage, who wrote soon after that Paik's "work, conversation, performances, daily doings never cease by turn to amaze, delight, shock and even terrify me."

Paik arrived in New York for the first time in 1964, and almost immediately made his presence felt by staging a number of avant-garde performances that included music, nudity, television technology and a large, jury-rigged robot of his own design, Robot K-456. In most cases, the music — and the nudity — was provided by Charlotte Moorman, a young cellist and well-known interpreter of avant-garde music who, after overcoming her initial shock, assisted in Paik's plans to bring sex to music. "Sex is major theme in art and literature," Paik explains. "Why not in music?"

Paik's first show, at the New School for Social Research, was typical of those that followed. It included a number of color-television experiments, Paik's Robot K-456, a few sculptural pieces and the premiere of Paik's first work for Miss Moorman, "Cello Sonata No. 1 for Adults Only." Miss Moorman appeared in an evening gown and played a few measures of Bach's Third Cello Suite, then stopped and removed an article of clothing. She played a few more measures, stopped again and removed another article of clothing. The piece continued in this fashion until she was almost completely nude.

The review in the next day's New York Herald Tribune began: "There were some strange doings last night at the New School. . . ." (Three years later, Miss Moorman was arrested for indecent exposure during her performance of Paik's "Opera Sextronique." She was convicted in a highly publicized trial and given a suspended sentence.)

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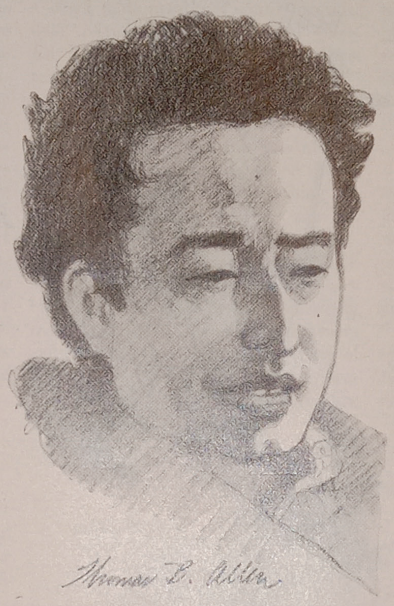
May 5, 1975

PROFILES

VIDEO VISIONARY



Nam June Paik

THE video-art movement, which has been in high gear for more than three years now, can have come as a surprise to practically no one. Most of the people who are trying to turn the cathode-ray tube into an art medium belong to the under-thirty, or TV, generation—which means, according to current estimates, that each of them has spent, on the average, about fifteen thousand hours watching television. Television has been their landscape, in a way, and it would appear inevitable that they should want to make use of it. Until quite recently, the huge costs of working with television equipment made it all but impossible for anyone outside the commercial-TV studios to tap into the medium, but with the marketing in the mid-sixties of relatively inexpensive, portable videotape recorders the territory suddenly opened up, and the artists, who had been toeing the line in anticipation, lit out for the new electronic frontier.

More than a dozen New York art galleries are currently handling "personal" videotapes by artists. Leo Castelli's downtown gallery, at 420 West Broadway, which last season merged its video and film operations with the Sonnabend Gallery, in the same building, shows and distributes videotapes by twenty-four artists, while Howard Wise, who gave up his Fifty-seventh Street gallery in 1970 to concentrate on helping video art get started, handles the distribution of work by thirty-eight more, through his Electronic Arts Intermix. Artists' videotapes, most of which are available on cassettes that can be viewed on special monitor-receivers equipped for the purpose, are leased, as a rule, to museums and to university and college art departments, but requests also come in from high schools and community groups throughout the country, and there are even a few early-bird private collectors who buy them outright. Publications with names like *Radical Software* have sprung up, devoted to the "alternative TV" movement. The Museum of Modern Art's Open Circuits conference on video art in January of 1974 drew participants from as far away as Argentina and Japan, and both the Modern and the Whitney Museums now include videotapes in their over-all program. Concurrently with the action in galleries and museums, moreover, three of the most active public-television stations in the country—WGBH, in Boston, KQED, in San Francisco, and WNET, in New York—have established experimental workshops where artists are invited to work with the complex and sophisticated hardware of broadcast TV. The results might startle regular viewers of the "Lawrence Welk Show," but they have met with generally encouraging reactions from the critics, and funding for the workshops—largely by the Rockefeller Foundation—seems reasonably well assured. In the wings, meanwhile, lies the glittering and often delayed promise of cable television, or CATV: the promise of as many as sixty new channels, with hundreds of thousands of viewing hours to be filled somehow—a vast empty canvas not yet smeared and scumbled over by the Sponsor. As far back as 1965, Nam June Paik saw it as a "historical necessity" that "someday artists will work with capacitors, resistors, and semiconductors as they work today with brushes, violins, and junk."

Nam June Paik is slightly embarrassed about being known as the George Washington of video art. A smallish, rather self-effacing Korean whose English is still, after ten years in this country, so nearly impervious to the definite and indefinite articles that it is hard to understand him on first, or even second, meeting, he shunned the spotlight at the Museum of Modern Art's Open Circuits conference, which took its title from a statement he had published in 1966. When Paik, with nervously oscillating eyebrows and a woollen stomach warmer, came up to the front of the room to speak, he praised other artists in the movement and then showed portions of his videotape "Global Groove." No doctrinal statements, no manifestos, no fuss. It is a fact, however, that Paik began thinking about video as an art form back in 1959, when he mentioned it in a letter to John Cage, and that his 1963 exhibition at the Galerie Parnass, in Wuppertal, Germany, was the first show of video art anywhere. This was several years before the advent of lightweight video equipment, but in those days Paik was not thinking in terms of cameras or recorders; he was thinking solely in terms of the image on the home screen. He went in through the back of the set and played around with that image, changing voltages and cycles, warping and distorting the picture and reintroducing a lot of the technical flaws that television engineers had spent years trying to eliminate. "It was Paik who saw that the way the signal is created on the monitor presented all sorts of opportunities for new images," David Loxton, the director of WNET's Television Laboratory, said recently. "That vision obviously made everyone stop and think. You could really make TV just by manipulating signals electronically, without all this insane two-thousand-dollars-a-minute business of studio production."

Many of the gallery artists now working in video are not interested in signal manipulation at all—they use the equipment simply to record activities, processes, or environments in much the same way that a movie camera would. The range of possibilities for signal manipulation is virtually limitless, how-

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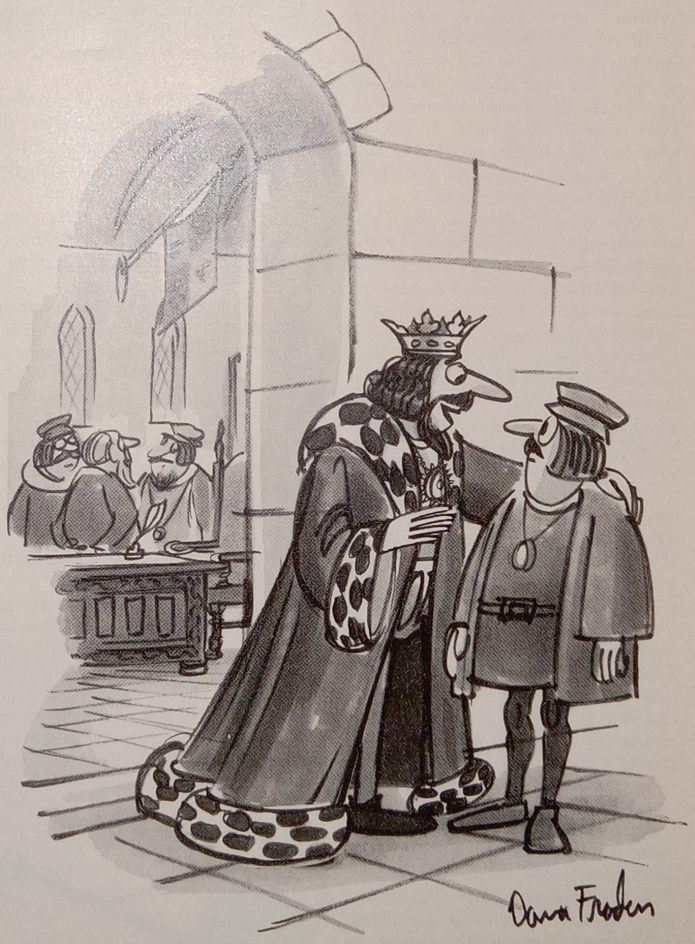
ever, thanks in part to an electronic device called the videosynthesizer, which Paik and a Japanese collaborator, Shuya Abe, designed and built, and signal manipulation is one of the areas that make video an infinitely more flexible medium than cinema. In the hands of Paik, Ron Hays, Ed Emshwiller, and other practitioners, the synthesizer can produce a ceaseless kaleidoscope of shapes and colors on the screen—shapes and colors unlike anything anyone has ever seen before. It can superimpose as many as seven different images; cause the features of announcers and other unsuspecting subjects to vibrate, melt, change color, and spread laterally; and generally turn the familiar screen into an electronic canvas for an artist whose brush consists of light. Watching television is not the same experience as watching a movie. Instead of seeing light reflected from a screen, the video viewer looks directly into the light source, and that is why the colors in color TV are so luminous. "Film is chemicals, TV is electronics," Paik points out. "There are something like four million phosphor dots on a twenty-one-inch color television screen every second; it is just like Seurat—you mix them in your eye. In film, you take from reality; in TV, you produce reality—real electronic color."

Psychological differences exist as well. As Marshall McLuhan has pointed out, a new medium usually begins by imitating the content of the medium that preceded it: the first automobiles looked like horse-drawn broughams; the first motion pictures were filmed stage plays. For more than thirty years, most of the dramatic entertainment on television has been little more than shrunken cinema, movies squeezed down to the dimensions and the commercially dictated time structures of the home screen, and this is one reason that even the movies made for television seem so drained of life and so blatantly artificial. The cinematic model simply won't work on the tube. But as art in our time becomes more and more a question of information, of dealing with our incredible public reality, the validity of TV as an art medium grows increasingly evident. "The big difference between film and video is that you need darkness for film and you have to stop other activities," Paik observed last spring, "but with video you can do everything and still watch—it's a continuation of your life."

The nature of the medium and the fact that videotape, which can be erased and reused, is a great deal cheaper to work with than film have lured filmmakers as well as artists to experiment with it. Shirley Clarke, who used to make film documentaries (the 1967 "Portrait of Jason," for instance, about a black male prostitute), now presides over a studio for experimental video. Ed Emshwiller, considered the finest technician among the so-called underground group of filmmakers, has been working mostly in television of late. Although it has become modish for art critics to state that the video movement has yet to produce anything resembling a major work of art, the TV reviewers have responded enthusiastically to Emshwiller's work on WNET and to Paik's "Global Groove"—a high-velocity collage of images ranging from Japanese Pepsi-Cola commercials, through tap-dancers, to views of the Living Theatre performing "Paradise Now," most of which are subjected to surreal distortions and overlaid by the light-painting techniques of the Paik-Abe videosynthesizer.

Paik himself uses the videosynthesizer less and less these days. He is pleased that others are using it, and he says, typically, that they do it much better than he does. Paik has always been far more interested in processes than in results, and at the moment, as an artist-in-residence at WNET's Television Laboratory and a consultant on television to the Rockefeller Foundation, he is concerned with a great many different processes, not all of which even involve television. But video remains the basis of his wide-ranging and somewhat visionary cast of thought. "I believe in timing," he said last spring. "Somehow, you have to be at a certain point at a certain time. You have to 'meet the time,' as they say



"Forget I'm King Henry III. I'm talking to you now as plain Henry Plantagenet."

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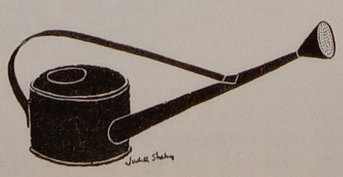
in Chinese history. I start in 1960, first time television sets become cheap, become secondhand, like junk. I buy thirteen secondhand sets in 1962. I didn't have any preconceived idea. Nobody had put two frequencies into one place, so I just do that, horizontal and vertical, and this absolutely new thing comes out. I make mistake after mistake, and it comes out positive. That is story of my whole life."

ONE explanation for Paik's success as a video pioneer may be that he came to television by way of music. Visual artists—painters and sculptors—are accustomed to filling up space; they do not always understand how to use time, as a great many of their "performance pieces" in recent years have made painfully evident. Paik was trained as a musician, however, and, no matter what else may be said of his performance pieces and his videotapes, hardly anyone finds them tedious. "My experimental TV is not always interesting but not always uninteresting," he observed on the occasion of his 1963 show in Wuppertal. It was, he went on, "like nature, which is beautiful not because it changes beautifully but simply because it changes."

Paik's musical education, though it was thorough, took place largely on the sly. In Korea, he has explained, professional artists and musicians have no status at all. "We have expression 'man of letters,' same as here, and if a man of letters writes music or does painting, that's O.K. But professional musician is nothing." Paik's family, which was middle-class and periodically well-to-do, would not have looked with favor on his musical studies, but the family did not learn about them until it was too late. "We are really one of the most corrupted families in Korea," says Paik, who was born in Seoul in 1932. "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 become 'people's factories.' It was all luck and unluck. Sometimes I felt I was on wrong side, because I had such radical thoughts. In 1950, we were on refugee train and bombing started. We get out and I really don't know which side I am on. Then I thought, Well—enlightenment!—I will just look at everything from now on like baseball. You know, nothing serious. I became quite cynical." Paik and his family did manage to escape the country in 1950, and, because of South Korea's stringent military-conscription law, he could technically be arrested as a draft dodger if he ever returned.

The family went first to Hong Kong, where Paik's father dabbled in the ginseng-root business, and then to Tokyo. Paik, the youngest of five children, entered the University of Tokyo, took courses in philosophy and history and aesthetics, secretly studied Western music (only one course in Oriental music was being taught), and graduated in 1956 with a degree in aesthetics.



Paik's two older brothers were businessmen by then, but their father allowed Paik to go off to Germany, ostensibly to work for his doctorate in philosophy: "He liked the idea that one son gets Ph.D." Graduate work at the University of Munich and the Conservatory in Freiburg gave him a thorough grounding in music history and theory and in piano technique, although, as Paik tells it, he was so shy as a student that he never even considered the possibility of performing in public. "I was always very serious, straight-A student, but so timid that when I played in front of my teacher, Chopin or Bach, my tempo would go up and down, up and down."

What interested Paik far more than Chopin or Bach even then was the

THE BECKETT KIT

I finally found a way of using the tree.
If the man is lying down with the sheep
while the dog stands, then the wooden tree
can also stand, in the back, next to the dog.

They show their widest parts
(the dog sideways, the tree frontal)
so that being next to each other
they function as a landscape.

I tried for nearly two months to use the tree.
I tried using it by putting the man,
standing, of course, very far from the sheep
but in more or less the same plane.
At one point I had the man almost off the table
and still couldn't get the tree to work.
It was only just now I thought of a way.

I dropped the wooden sheep from a few inches
above the table so they wouldn't bounce.
Some are on their backs but they serve
the same as the ones standing.
What I can't get over is their coming right
inadvertently when I'd be content with any solution.

Ah, world, I love you with all my heart.
Outside the open window, down the street near the Hudson,
I can hear a policeman talking to another
through the car radio. It's eleven stories down
so it must be pretty loud.
The sheep, the tree, the dog, and the man
are perfectly at peace. And my peace is at peace.
Time and the earth lie down wonderfully together.

The blacks probably do rape the whites in jail
as Bill said in the coffee shop watching the game
between Oakland and Cincinnati. And no doubt
Karl was right that we should have volunteered
as victims under the bombing of Hanoi.

A guy said to Mishkin, "If you've seen all that,
how can you go on saying you're happy?"

—LINDA GREGG

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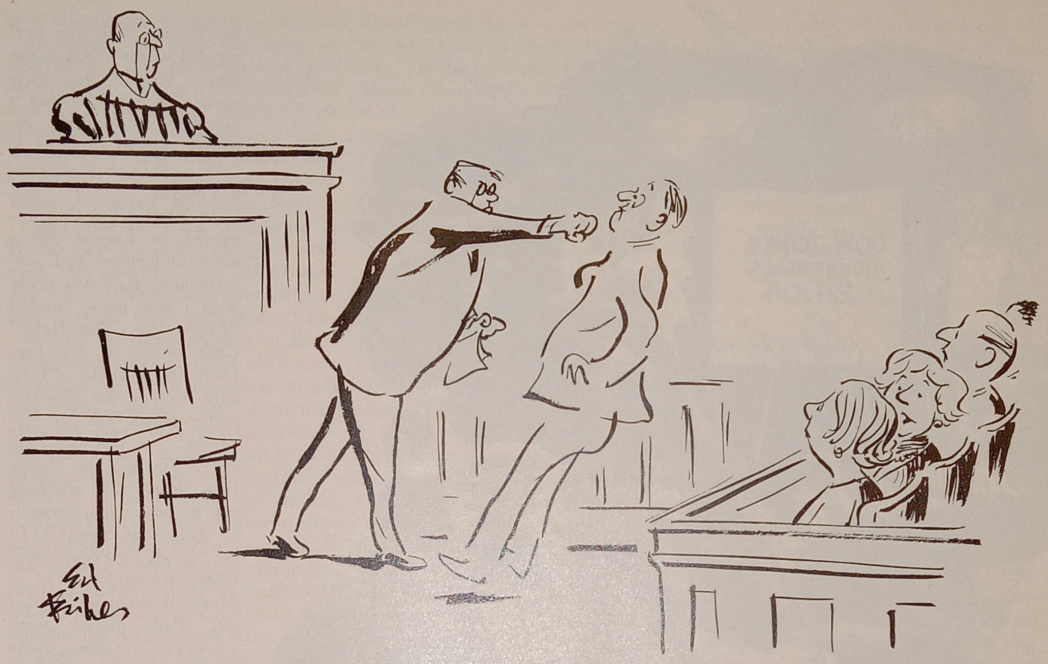

"I think that's the last of his peremptory challenges."

music of the twentieth century. As a high-school student in Seoul, he had tried for three years to find any recording of Arnold Schoenberg's works, and finally found "Verklärte Nacht," which he had read about in *Time*. He also managed, through great diligence, to find a recording of Stravinsky's "Firebird" ("I will never forget the red label, with Stokowski conducting Philadelphia Orchestra") but not of "The Rite of Spring." "Then, when I got to Tokyo, I heard on radio some music with girl weeping, and I said, 'Oh, must be Schoenberg.' It was 'Pierrot Lunaire,' first time I hear it. Such a big event for me."

Germany in the fifties was a center of the newest developments in music, most of which had to do with electronic means of composition. Karlheinz Stockhausen, György Ligeti, Mauricio Kagel, and other avant-garde composers were working at the Studio for Electronic Music, which had been established by Radio Cologne, and one of Paik's teachers at the Conservatory in Freiburg, Wolfgang Fortner, strongly urged him to go there. He took Fortner's advice and enrolled at the University of Cologne, but for the first year there he was too shy to approach any of the other young composers. He was writing music, but not confidently. In Munich, he had composed a string quartet, which, he says, "started out Bartók, became Schoenberg, and ended Webern." While at Freiburg, he wrote a composition based on a ninth-century Korean poem, in which he included certain tape-recorded "collage" elements, such as water sounds, a baby's babbling, and snatches of Tchaikovsky. Later, he edged further into the electronic field with taped compositions of himself chanting or shouting. And at about this juncture, in 1958, he met John Cage—the event that he considers the turning point in his life.

Cage, the irrepressible American avant-gardist, whom Schoenberg once described as "not a composer but an inventor of genius," had decided by then that electronic music was "dead as a doornail." Cage had noticed that the audiences at concerts of all-electronic music invariably went to sleep. He believed that the healthier tendencies in all the arts then were moving in the direction of theatre, and he made sure that his own compositions gave audiences something to look at as well as listen to; most of these visual activities were dictated, like his music, by chance operations, and the results were often hilarious. Paik was still living in Tokyo when he first heard about Cage, and shortly afterward he had been both astounded and pleased to hear Professor Yoshio Nomura, who taught music history at the University of Tokyo, and whose special area was the Gregorian chant, name Cage's "String Quartet in Four Parts" among the ten best musical works of the twentieth century.

When Cage came to Darmstadt on a concert and lecture tour in 1958, Paik took in the performance and later went to call on the composer at his hotel. He was rather shocked to find Cage washing his shirts. It seemed to Paik that someone with Cage's attitude toward music should not waste any time on details of personal appearance; nor did Paik approve of the fact that Cage had worn a dark-blue suit and a necktie when he performed. They got along well enough in spite of this, however, and discovered that they were both engrossed just then in Mallarmé's writings on chance. Paik asked Cage whether he meant to be funny when he did things like blowing whistles or rattling eggbeaters onstage. Cage replied that he did not set out deliberately to be funny—for example, the whistles in the collage piece called "Music Walk" had simply been a means of making sounds while his hands were occupied in making other sounds—but that if something turned out to be fun-

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"But they don't say plus or minus, you'll notice. You can't get more fiendish than that."

• •

ny in performance, as the whistles had, then he could accept that without difficulty. In general, he said, he preferred laughter to tears.

For Paik, all this was hugely liberating. Cage, who is not always comforted by the work of people he has inspired, tends now to belittle his influence on Paik. "I don't believe in this business of people influencing other people," he said recently. "Maybe Nam June's meeting me made it possible for him to go on and do the things he was going to do sooner or later anyway, but only because it was already in him to do them. The fact is that he took my ideas into areas where I would never have gone." In the pieces that Paik began to compose after 1958, there was often an element of violence, which was entirely foreign to anything in Cage. Paik, the timid student who could not conceive of playing the piano in public, now found it within his power to compose and perform a work called "Hommage à John Cage," in which he caused an upright piano to tip over and fall on the stage with a crash. (Stockhausen, watching from the front row, leaped up and started to lift it back up again, until he was dissuaded by Paik; they have been close friends ever since.) In "One for Violin," Paik stood facing the audience, holding by the neck a violin with both hands, which he raised slowly—so slowly that the movement was all but imperceptible; when the violin was above his head, he would bring it down (fortissimo) on a table in front of him, smashing it to smithereens. He performed these and other pieces in small galleries around Cologne and in the atelier of Mary Bauermeister, a painter friend, and later in museums and concert halls in Oslo, Copenhagen, and Stockholm. Paik also performed works by Cage and others, and he was enormously encouraged when a German music critic referred to him in print as "the world's most famous bad pianist."

In 1960, when Cage returned to Europe for a series of lectures and performances, Paik was ready with a new piece, entitled "Étude for Pianoforte." Cage recalls its first performance vividly. "It is hard to describe why his performances are so terrifying," he said not long ago. "You get the feeling very clearly that anything can happen, even physically dangerous things." In the "Étude for Pianoforte," whose première was in Mary Bauermeister's studio, Paik played some Chopin on the piano, broke off, weeping, and got up and threw himself upon the innards of another, eviscerated piano that lay scattered about the floor, then picked up a wickedly long pair of scissors and leaped down to where Cage, the pianist David Tudor, and Karlheinz Stockhausen were sitting, in the front row. He removed Cage's suit jacket and started to slash away at his shirt with the scissors. Later, he explained that he had intended to cut off the shirttail but when he saw that Cage was not wearing an undershirt he took pity on him and decided instead to cut off his necktie at the knot. After doing so, he poured a bottle of shampoo over Cage's head and also over David Tudor's. (As Stockhausen edged nervously away, Paik shouted, "Not for you!") When the bottle was empty and both Cage and Tudor were fully lathered, Paik forced his way through the crowded room to the door and ran out. Everyone sat as though stunned, Cage recalls, for several minutes. Finally, the telephone rang; it was Paik, calling to say that the concert was over.

Performances of this sort, with their clear echoes of the Dadaist manifestations of the nineteen-twenties, had a good deal in common with the events called "happenings" which were going on in New York about this same time

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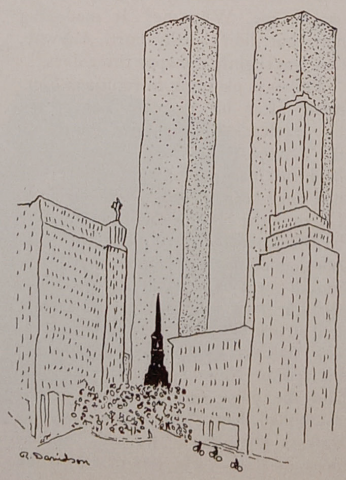
in small galleries and artists' lofts. The "happenings" were in one sense an outgrowth of the process-oriented, gestural Action painting of Jackson Pollock and other artists of the New York School, and the most prominent "happeners" were visual artists, such as Claes Oldenburg, Jim Dine, Red Grooms, Robert Whitman, and Allan Kaprow (who coined the term "happening"). It was generally acknowledged, however, that the first true "happening" had been a collaborative event organized by John Cage and Merce Cunningham, the choreographer, at Black Mountain College in 1952, and Cage's influence on the whole phenomenon was strong and pervasive. A number of young New York musicians, dancers, and artists, many of whom had attended Cage's classes in experimental music at the New School (so had Kaprow himself), had also become interested in doing performance pieces that could be described as Action music, but they lacked the gallery facilities of the better-known artists and had a hard time finding performance space. Then, in 1961, George Maciunas took up their cause. Maciunas, a Lithuanian-born graphic designer who seemed to have a hand in any number of money-losing operations, was then a part owner of a Madison Avenue art gallery called the AG Gallery, and early that year he sponsored there a series of about a dozen events by Dick Higgins, Richard Maxfield, Jackson Mac Low, La Monte Young, and other friends of his. Maciunas and Mac Low also took over the design and printing of a publication called "An Anthology," edited by the composer La Monte Young, which included "scripts" for "happening"-type events by twenty-five contributors; among them was Nam June Paik, whose European performances Maciunas had heard about.

When the AG Gallery folded, in the summer of 1961, Maciunas went to Europe with the idea of founding a periodical devoted to what he considered the rapidly changing directions in all the arts. The periodical was to be called *Fluxus* (for work "in flux"), but it never got off the ground. Instead, Maciunas organized a series of Fluxus Festivals around Europe—in Wiesbaden, Copenhagen, Paris, Düsseldorf, Stockholm, Nice, and London—with a fluctuating troupe that usually included George Brecht, Ben Vautier, Tomas Schmit, Bob Watts, Emmett Williams, and various other unfettered spirits, who, along with Paik, Dick Higgins, and his wife, Alison Knowles, formed the core of the Fluxus group. Fluxus events tended to be more Dada in spirit than "happenings," which were primarily visual. La Monte Young's "Composition, 1960, #7" called for a singer and an accompanist to sound the same two notes (B and F sharp) continuously for one hour. Wolf Vostell, a blond giant from Cologne, did a piece in which he hammered toys to pieces, tried to erase pages of a magazine, broke light bulbs against a piece of glass, and then threw cake at the broken bulbs. Higgins' "Danger Music No. 3" had Alison Knowles shave Higgins' head and fling political pamphlets at the audience. The aesthetic behind all this was somewhat elusive. George Brecht tried to explain it at one point by stating that Fluxus was against the exclusiveness and élitism of art. Anything can be art and anyone can do it, Brecht wrote, and "therefore, art-amusement must be simple, amusing, unpretentious, concerned with insignificances, require no skill or countless rehearsals, have no commodity or institutional value." It could be said that Brecht was speaking only for himself, inasmuch as the Fluxus people denied that they were part of a movement, and even that they had similar ideas and goals, but the anti-art, neo-Dada bias of the members was never in much doubt.

Paik's performances differed from those of the other Fluxus people in that they were hardly ever boring, intentionally or otherwise. Everything that he did onstage was done with an excruciating and highly theatrical intensity, and there was often that sense of physical danger which had frightened Cage. Allan Kaprow described Paik as a "cultural terrorist," and Higgins went so far as to criticize his "joy in the perverse." Paik hammered nails into pianos, or attacked them with a carpenter's plane. ("People have idea that piano is very expensive, very sacred," he explained. "I was not thinking about destruction at all.") He crawled underneath the instrument and licked the dust from the pedals. He also composed works that would now qualify as Conceptual art, including a score for a symphony "to last one million years," and a long series of correspondence events that involved mailing pennies to people in various parts of the world. His return address at this point was the University for Avant-Garde Hinduism, which he had founded, and of which he was the sole member. ("I like Hinduism," Paik once said. "Is not so restricted as other religions, and they like sex, too.") Most people had trouble understanding him. He spoke five languages besides Korean, all of them badly. Something that nobody knew was that he had a studio on the outskirts of Cologne, where he and an engineer friend spent endless hours taking apart and rewiring thirteen secondhand black-and-white television sets.



TELEVISION pictures are produced by a flow of electrons moving in straight lines across the phosphor-coated surface of a cathode-ray tube. Paik and his friend interfered with this flow of electrons in a variety of ways. They altered the horizontal input to make the image stretch laterally across the screen. They used sound waves to warp the image, and they reversed the black and white controls to make negative images. Odd, distorted shapes floated unfixed through fields of electronic static. Paik hooked up one set to a microphone so that when you talked into the mike the image would jump around on the screen. It was all quite complicated electronically—nothing as simple as the blurring or tumbling effects that you get inadvertently by fiddling with the horizontal and vertical controls. Paik learned television circuitry backward and forward. "I still did not consider myself a visual artist," he has said of that period. "But I knew there was something to be done in television and nobody else was doing it, so I said why not make it my job?" If it had not been for television, Paik said, he might still be breaking up pianos.

Paik's thirteeen doctored TV sets were presented to the public in the spring of 1963, at the Galerie Parnass, in Wuppertal. Nobody bought one; Paik had suspended the head of a

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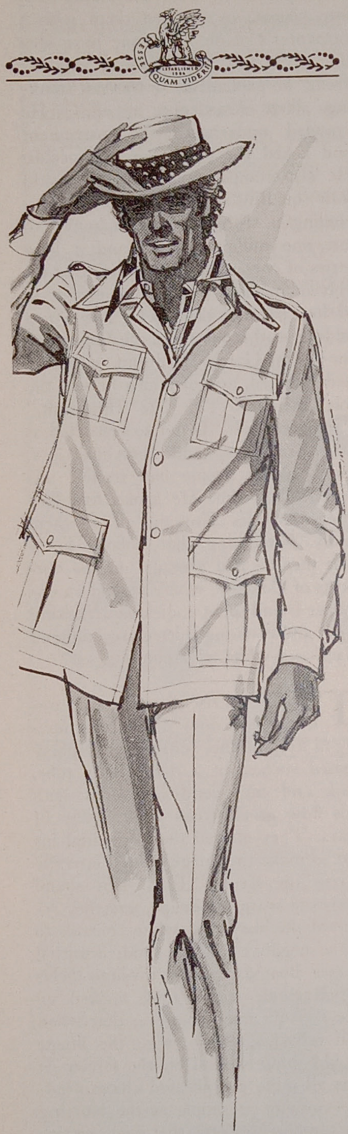

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freshly slaughtered ox over the door to the gallery, and that attracted more attention than the electronics. Soon afterward, Paik closed his Cologne studio and went back to Tokyo. He wanted to experiment with color television, which was not available in Europe then. In Tokyo, he met a man named Hideo Uchida—an electronics wizard, who was interested in using FM radio to test for extrasensory perception. Uchida introduced Paik to a young Japanese electronics engineer, Shuya Abe, and Abe soon became Paik's principal collaborator. Together they interfered with electron flows in color sets, and Paik discovered, to his delight, that it was impossible to control the results, because each set worked a little differently. A true disciple of Cage, Paik did not want to make anything that would be a mere reflection of his own personality. What he was after was indeterminacy—the image created by chance—and he found that the behavior of electrons in a color television set was truly indeterminate. Paik and Abe also built an electronically controlled bisexual six-foot robot that walked, talked, moved its arms, and excreted white beans. In his spare moments, Paik tried to learn something about Oriental music and Oriental religion, neither of which had interested him at all until he met Cage. He spent three days in a Zen monastery near Kamakura, where he was beaten repeatedly by the head monk. "There were twenty or thirty people there, all sitting facing walls," Paik recalls. "In charge was monk with a long stick. We were not supposed to move, even if a mosquito bit. Every so often, monk would hit somebody with his stick, usually me. Why me? It made big noise but didn't really hurt. Anyway, that was slightly unhappy three days."

Paik was planning to return to Germany after his year in Tokyo, but he decided to spend six months in the United States first. America had held no interest for him before; he had once been offered a scholarship to Dartmouth, but Germany seemed to be the place for new music, and, besides, as he put it, "I knew that Dartmouth was not Yale." In 1964, though, he wanted to investigate what had struck him, from afar, as the curious "flatness" of American culture. He arrived in New York City in June, and the noise and the summer heat astonished him. "New York was as ugly as Düsseldorf," he said, "and as dirty as Paris." He was met by Dick Higgins, who took him to stay at the Broadway Central (the hotel that collapsed in 1973), where the carpet in his room was so filthy that he had to cover it with newspapers before he could sleep. Paik hated New York at first. He hated the dirt, and he also hated the glamour of the uptown art galleries and the spirit of commercialism that seemed to dominate the whole art scene. Even the New York artists seemed standoffish to him. "The key to Fluxus was that artists were killing individual egos," Paik said recently. "At least, that was how I interpreted it. But in New York artists have very big egos. I was never really anti-art, but I was anti-ego. Post-industrial society will be a kind of egoless society is what I think. Many people now are giving up acquisitiveness in terms of money and material comfort; next stage is to give up acquisitiveness in fame. Of course, Fluxus people, including myself, are vain and *do* have ego, I know that. Is very, very hard."

Within two months of his arrival, Paik made his presence felt in a typically disturbing fashion. As the centerpiece of a festival of avant-garde music at Judson Hall the festival's organizer, a twenty-four-year-old cellist named Charlotte Moorman, had scheduled five performances of Karlheinz Stockhausen's "Originale"—a theatre event in which Paik had appeared prominently when it was done in Europe. Stockhausen had told Miss Moorman that she could do the piece only on the condition that Nam June Paik's part was played by Nam June Paik, and Miss Moorman, who had never heard of Paik and was told he was in Europe, was wondering how to reach him there when Paik called her. He had arrived a few days before, had heard about the production, and would be happy to re-create his role and assist in the rehearsals. Paik's role consisted of covering his head with shaving cream and rice, slowly unrolling a long Chinese scroll, plunging his head into a pail of water, screaming, and playing the piano; for the New York production he added his electronic robot, which had come over with him from Tokyo, and which walked about the stage, waving its left arm, twirling its left breast, and playing a tape recording of President John F. Kennedy's 1961 Inaugural Address. On the fourth night, just as Paik was starting his performance, three well-dressed young men rose from the front row of the audience, came up onstage, handcuffed Paik to a metal scaffolding there, and

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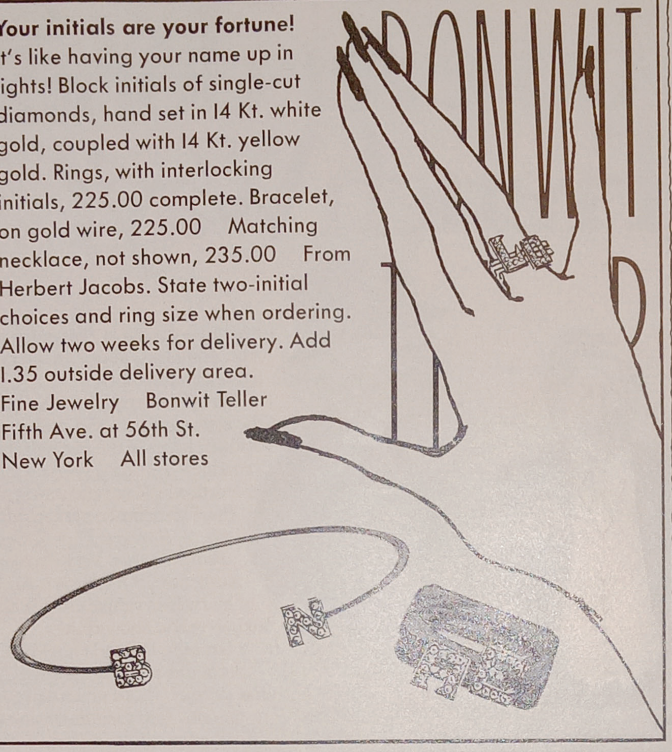

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then disappeared out the back of the set. The audience thought that it was part of the performance. Paik made plaintive sounds, and Miss Moorman, terrified, called the police. Told by their producer that they were breaking a number of municipal ordinances (for one thing, the cast included a live chimpanzee without a leash), she called the police station back to tell the police not to bother coming, but they were already on their way. They arrived a few minutes later, freed Paik, found the perpetrators, whom nobody in the cast had ever seen before, and asked whether Paik wanted to press charges. Paik said no. A good many people in the audience thought that all this was probably part of the show, too.

The meeting between Paik and Miss Moorman was auspicious for both parties. Although they have never been romantically involved with one another—Miss Moorman is happily married, and Paik now lives with a pretty Japanese video artist named Shigeko Kubota—virtually all of Paik's performance pieces since 1964 have been written for Miss Moorman, whose indefatigable dedication to his work and to the work of other advanced composers once led Edgard Varèse to refer to her as "the Jeanne d'Arc of New Music." In her service to the new, Miss Moorman has travelled rather a long distance from her musical origins, in Little Rock, Arkansas, where she began studying the cello at the age of ten. She took her bachelor's degree in music at Centenary College, in Shreveport; went on to get her master's at the University of Texas; and proceeded to Juilliard, in New York, where she studied with Leonard Rose. She spent the preceding summer at Ivan Galamian's Meadowmount School of Music, near Elizabethtown, New York, considered the best in the world for string players. After she left Juilliard, she became a regular member of the American Symphony Orchestra, under Leopold Stokowski, and also of the Boccherini Players, a chamber-music group. To gain concert experience, Miss Moorman performed as a soloist with any number of lesser symphonic groups, and in 1961, during one such concert, in darkest New Jersey, while Miss Moorman was performing the Kabalevsky Cello Concerto for the thirty-fifth time in public, she caught herself wondering whether she had locked the door to her apartment and turned off the gas stove. This led her to wonder, in turn, whether a career in traditional music was precisely what she wanted.

About this time, Miss Moorman and

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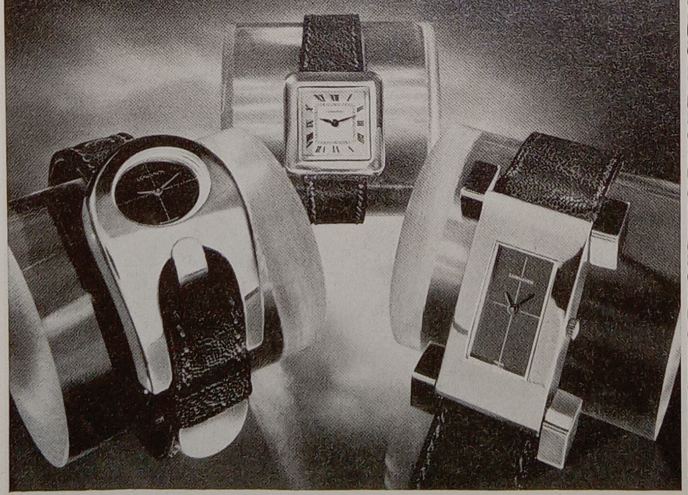

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Yoko Ono, who had just left Sarah Lawrence College, moved into an apartment together on West End Avenue. Both of them had recently been separated from their first husbands—in Miss Moorman's case, a double-bass player who had been her college sweetheart in Texas. Yoko Ono was the daughter of a wealthy Tokyo banking family. She and her estranged husband, a Japanese music student named Toshi Ichiyanagi, had been thoroughly involved with the musical avant-garde in New York, and it was not long before Miss Moorman found herself becoming thoroughly involved with it, too. A year before, Miss Moorman had managed to arrange for the Town Hall début of the young Japanese violinist Kenji Kobayashi, a friend of Yoko's; she had done this by persuading an impresario named Norman Seaman to sponsor the event and then going around to Isamu Noguchi and other well-known Japanese Americans and persuading them to put up the money. In the fall of 1961, Miss Moorman got Seaman to sponsor a rather different sort of concert, by Yoko and her friends—a group of musicians, poets, and dancers that included La Monte Young, Philip Corner, Joseph Byrd, Jackson Mac Low, Yvonne Rainer, Jonas Mekas, Ay-o, and George Brecht. Seated on a toilet on the stage at Carnegie Recital Hall that evening, with her back to the audience, and making "non-cello sounds" on her cello, as the score indicated, Miss Moorman again had cause to wonder whether her long musical education was being properly applied. But she felt that the event was interesting somehow, and she did not think about the gas stove while she was performing. She went on to perform in other avant-garde events, and then, in 1963, without realizing what she was getting into, she put her formidable energy and persuasiveness to work organizing a one-week festival of new music, which the steely-nerved Norman Seaman again agreed to sponsor, at Judson Hall. This was the start of what has ever since been an annual New York event.

The 1963 festival was all music—or what was so described in avant-garde circles—by Cage, La Monte Young, Morton Feldman, Frederic Rzewski, and others. The dividing line between music and other forms was under heavy assault, however, and when Miss Moorman put the second festival together, in August and September of 1964, she was only too happy to broaden its scope. Stockhausen's "Originale," the main feature of that

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series, was more "happening" than music, and the annual avant-garde festival has since become a catchall, accommodating just about every far-out activity that anyone involved can think up. Some people feel that Miss Moorman has found her true vocation as the organizer of these events. According to Cage, who usually vows not to take part in the festival but then succumbs to Miss Moorman's relentless urging, "Charlotte's real talent is for publicity." Miss Moorman herself takes great pride in the festival, but she believes that her work as Paik's leading interpreter is of equal importance.

Paik made Miss Moorman a star, in a sense, and she made possible a long-postponed desire of Paik's—to bring sex to music. "Sex has been a main theme in art and literature," Paik said not long ago. "Why not in music? Why should music be fifty years behind? In Cologne, I had idea for a concert where 'Moonlight' Sonata is played by woman nude. I thought it would be very beautiful to do this in Germany. But I couldn't find anyone to do it. Piano players are very middle-class, it seems. In my 'Étude for Pianoforte,' I wanted to have girl who would take off many pairs of panties. I even tried to get prostitutes, but none of them would agree." Miss Moorman had some difficulty at first with Paik's ideas, but she got over it. Soon after their meeting, he composed his "Cello Sonata No. 1 for Adults Only," which Miss Moorman performed at the New School in January of 1965. In this work, Miss Moorman, a rather small girl with a full figure and a totally serious manner of performing, starts out fully gowned and plays a few measures of the Prelude to Bach's Third Cello Suite; she stops, removes an article of clothing, and resumes playing, stops again, removes something else, and continues alternately playing and removing until she is down to nothing at all. Paik's next composition for her was "Variations on a Theme by Saint-Saëns," which had its première at the third avant-garde festival. In this one, Miss Moorman plays the first half of Saint-Saëns's "The Swan," gets up and submerges herself in an oil drum filled with water, then returns dripping wet to finish the piece. Sometimes she performs the "Variations" in an evening gown, and sometimes she wears nothing but a covering of clear plastic. Miss Moorman said recently that she enjoys performing this piece, because she is a Scorpio and her sign is water. Paik says she invariably plays much better after her immersion. Both Paik and

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Miss Moorman claim that the piece is not meant to seem comic, although Paik, who laughs a lot, is inclined to laugh when discussing it. "In Korea, being artist is bad enough," Paik has said. "To be comedian is even worse."

Paik and Miss Moorman took their repertoire abroad in the summer of 1965, and presented it to variously appreciative audiences in Reykjavík, Paris, Cologne, Frankfurt, Aachen, Berlin, and Florence. The excitable Florentines rioted when Miss Moorman made her entrance in clear plastic, and the police had to be called to restore order. At the Galerie Parnass, in Wuppertal, scene of his pioneer 1963 video show, Paik and Miss Moorman teamed with Joseph Beuys, Bazon Brock, Tomas Schmit, and other European artists in a marathon event called "24 Stunden," which lasted twenty-four hours. In Berlin, they came close to being arrested for performing Paik's "Robot Opera" in front of the Brandenburg Gate. In the opera, Miss Moorman sits on the floor of a crouching artist (Beuys or Brock) and plays the cello while another artist lies on the ground at her feet with the cello's ferrule held in his mouth and Paik's robot marches to and fro. The armed guards near the Berlin Wall had not been warned ahead of time, and rifles were cocked in nervous anticipation. Miss Moorman also performed works by Cage and by Yoko Ono (one of the crowd-pleasers was Yoko Ono's "Cut Piece," in which members of the audience are invited to come up and cut sections out of Miss Moorman's dress with a pair of scissors), and she and Paik took part in a variety of events in and around Cologne. The tour was a great success, from their point of view. "The Germans love Charlotte," Paik said afterward. "They think she is what American girl ought to be."

Paik and Miss Moorman returned to New York in time for Miss Moorman to put together the 1965 annual Festival of the Avant-Garde, which was also the last to be held in Judson Hall. The management there became upset over Allan Kaprow's "Push-Pull" event, which enjoined the audience to go out and search in trash bins and vacant lots for discarded objects with which to furnish two empty rooms onstage. Once again the police appeared, largely out of curiosity to see what was going on, but the Judson Hall management did not get into the spirit of the thing.

WHEN Paik was not composing or performing, he invoked the muse of TV. He had brought over from Tokyo a number of large secondhand television sets, with which he experimented continually at a studio he had settled into, on Canal Street. Visitors to the studio, over whose entrance Dick Higgins had posted a sign reading "I AM NOT VERY ELOQUENT," had to crawl over and through a maze of exposed electrical wires, tubes, and discontinuous circuitry to find Paik. At home, he usually had on a pair of rubber boots, which were supposed to prevent his electrocution. He had also taken to wearing a woollen scarf around his middle, even in warm weather, to ward off stomach pains that several doctors had been unable to diagnose. There was no furniture to speak of. Three old R.C.A. black-and-white sets, pushed together and covered with a mattress, served as his bed. Paik had found that he could get magnificent distortions of TV pictures by using magnets and degaussing coils (devices employed in the earliest TV sets to *correct* for natural magnetic distortion). "Every night, ten million people were watching the same Johnny Carson," he recalls. "Only I was watching a different one." He experimented with video feedback, in which the camera is pointed at the receiver picking up that camera's signal and goes slightly crazy, producing unpredictable and more or less uncontrollable imagery. In 1966, he discovered the "dancing-wave pattern," a graceful, wavelike, looping image produced on a color TV screen by modulating three audio input signals. Paik's electrical engineering was not exactly elegant, but it seemed to work. Many of his connections were achieved with Scotch Tape. "For me," he once said, "Scotch Tape is *tao*."

Paik's television experiments did not pass unnoticed. He had exhibited his manipulated TVs at the New School in January of 1965—along with his "Sonata for Adults Only" and other works. One critic said the TVs reminded him of upset stomachs in commercials, but others were more impressed. Porter McCray, the director of the Asian Cultural Program of the JDR 3rd Fund, was impressed enough

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to recommend a six-thousand-dollar grant to further Paik's television experiments, and Cage and Merce Cunningham invited him to project his TV imagery as part of the stage set for their "Variations V," which was performed that summer at Lincoln Center. In the fall of 1965, the Galeria Bonino, on Fifty-seventh Street, gave Paik a one-man show, largely on the recommendation of his Cologne friend Mary Bauermeister, who was then living in New York. The roomful of doctored TVs drew exceptionally large crowds for three weeks; it also drew a relatively kindly review by the *Times* art critic, John Canaday, who said the show "has unquestioned fascination and a probable potential for expansion."

A month before the Bonino show, moreover, Paik personally ushered in the new era of alternative, or underground, TV. As early as 1961, in Cologne, he had spent a good deal of time and money trying to construct a portable, lightweight television camera and videotape recorder, but without success. "I was very naïve," Paik recalls. "I thought the first man to own videotape recorder could become best painter of the age." In Tokyo two years later, he had learned that Sony was developing just the sort of equipment he had in mind. He had kept himself posted on all the latest industry advances, and the day Sony's first reasonably portable video camera-recorder reached the Liberty Music shop, in New York—it was October 4, 1965—Paik bought it, using the unspent portion of the grant from the JDR 3rd Fund. Within moments, he had begun videotaping Pope Paul's arrival at St. Patrick's Cathedral, and a number of other scenes around town, which he showed that same evening to a regular Monday-night gathering of vanguard artists and filmmakers at the Café à Go-Go, in Greenwich Village.

Paik was feeling a lot better about New York. The exclusiveness of the artists, which had bothered him so much at first, he now saw as a necessary defense against the "information overload" to which everyone was constantly subjected. "I began to understand New York from the New York point of view, and I felt more at home. It's funny—coming to Istanbul once from Germany, I say to myself, 'Ah, is beginning of Asia.' And then when I go back to Tokyo in 1963 I say, 'Is beginning of America.' That kind of chaotic energy—you know?" Paik's own energy was unflagging. He toured Europe again with Miss Moorman in 1966, and they performed a gondola

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version of the Saint-Saëns piece in Venice, with Miss Moorman descending into the Grand Canal and subsequently being rushed to the hospital for a typhoid shot, which they had somehow overlooked. Paik helped out faithfully with all aspects of most of the yearly avant-garde festivals—the 1966 festival took place in Central Park, and subsequent sites have included a Staten Island ferryboat, the 69th Regiment Armory, Grand Central Terminal, and, most recently, Shea Stadium. In 1967, he figured prominently in two important group shows of kinetic-and-light art at the Howard Wise Gallery. If not yet wholly egoless, he was always willing to assist others and to participate in group efforts.

The only time anyone has ever seen Paik seriously depressed was in February of 1967, when the police stopped the performance of his new "Opera Sextronique." Paik had been a little nervous about doing this piece in New York. He and Miss Moorman had performed it without incident in Aachen the preceding July, and then in January at the Philadelphia College of Art, but New York was at that time in the grip of one of its rare public-morality seizures, and the police were abnormally alert to vice. "Opera Sextronique" has four "arias," or acts. In the first, Miss Moorman, wearing a bikini consisting of small electric light bulbs, plays the cello on a darkened stage; in the second, she wears a topless evening gown, plays the cello, and puts on and takes off a succession of grotesque masks; the third aria has her nude from the waist down and clothed in a football uniform and helmet above; in the fourth, she is totally nude, playing, in lieu of her cello, a large, upright aerial bomb. The New York performance, at the Film-Maker's Cinémathèque, on West Forty-first Street, was interrupted by a police squadron at the end of the second (topless) aria, and Miss Moorman and Paik were carted off to jail. Miss Moorman retains a vivid memory of Paik sitting for his police photograph with a number hung around his neck and saying mournfully, "Oh, Charlotte, I never think it come to this."

Later that night, in jail, Paik remembers, he felt very calm—"like the last scene in Stendhal's 'Rouge et Noir,' when Julien Sorel is so much at peace," he says. "I thought that when I got kicked out of United States I would be hero in Germany. I was happy things were ending here—all this complicated life. Well, we were released on parole next day, and a guy

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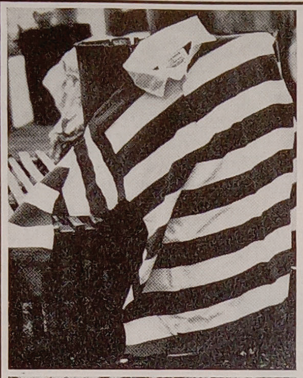

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called from San Francisco offering us five thousand dollars to do our 'act' in a night club. We had many offers like that." They accepted none of the offers, and Paik was hard pressed to raise money for their defense. His lawyer was Ernst Rosenberger, who had represented Lenny Bruce and other prominent performers. When the case came to court, in April of 1967, Rosenberger had no difficulty persuading the court that under no law could a composer of music be arrested for obscenity, but Miss Moorman was less fortunate. Although the flower of New York's avant-garde came to testify on her behalf—and in spite of the fact that nudity was rapidly becoming the obligatory scene in the New York theatre—she was convicted on a charge of indecent exposure and given a suspended sentence.

The conviction, according to Miss Moorman, caused her grandmother in Little Rock to suffer a heart attack, and ended her own career with the American Symphony and as a musician for TV commercials, which had until then been her main means of support. Lucrative offers to repeat the "act" in Las Vegas and elsewhere only made her feel worse about it all. Paik, too, was at a low ebb. He had been receiving small amounts of money from his family in Tokyo, but now they ceased to arrive; the family, he says, "had just lost another fortune." He owed a rather large bill to Consolidated Edison, which he couldn't pay, and he was having visa problems. It was with some relief, then, that he accepted a post as artist-in-residence at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, Long Island. Allan Kaprow, who was trying to establish a sort of avant-garde institute at Stony Brook with funds from the Rockefeller Foundation, had been instrumental in getting the assistant director of the Foundation's arts program, Howard Klein, to visit Paik's studio, and Klein and his boss, Norman Lloyd, had subsequently arranged a one-year appointment to Stony Brook for Paik. Nobody bothered him there, so he spent his time doing video experiments and writing a long report on the uses of television in the "instant global university" of the future. One of his recommendations was that television stop being exclusively nationalistic. "You simply cannot escape Camus or Sartre in a bookstore," he wrote. "But do you remember seeing a production of French TV recently?" Paik has followed his own advice—his recent "Global Groove" contains excerpts from French, German, Japanese, Aus-

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trian, and African TV—and he feels strongly that if we were to see more examples of Asian TV we might not misunderstand the Asian mind as disastrously as we have done in the past. Paik's report went unnoticed at Stony Brook, but it has been reprinted many times since he left there, and is looked upon within the alternative-video movement as a prophetic document.

The Rockefeller Foundation (which has no connection with the JDR 3rd Fund) has shown a surprising interest in experimental TV. While its grants to public television have been small compared to the Ford Foundation's, Rockefeller Foundation money supports the experimental workshops at San Francisco's KQED, Boston's WGBH, and New York's WNET, all three of which cater primarily to artists working in video. From the artists' point of view, the best of these workshops has been the one at WGBH, largely because of a young producer-director there named Fred Barzyk. As Barzyk saw it, television had begun to develop its unique properties in one field only—the spot-commercial message, which compresses huge quantities of information into a few seconds; in its regular programming, TV was still imitating the motion picture. In 1964, Barzyk was able to persuade the management at WGBH to let him play around with his own and other people's ideas for opening things up a bit, and one of the early results was "What's Happening, Mr. Silver?"—a youth-oriented, technically innovative weekly program whose host, a British-born and unpredictable man named David Silver, once conducted an on-camera interview with a young woman while they both reclined on a large bed. The fast cuts and visual juxtapositions in "What's Happening, Mr. Silver?" reminded some viewers of the vintage output of the late Ernie Kovacs, who is now considered a sort of pioneer in the effort to shake video loose from its moorings in cinema. Barzyk wanted to go a lot further along these lines, and in 1968, when the recently established Public Broadcast Laboratory (set up by the Ford Foundation to improve the level of noncommercial-television programming) asked him to work with a selected group of artists, each of whom would be invited to come and make videotapes in the WGBH studio, he readily agreed. This project led, in 1969, to a one-hour program called "The Medium Is the Medium," the first national showing of video art on the home screen, with contributions by Aldo Tambellini,

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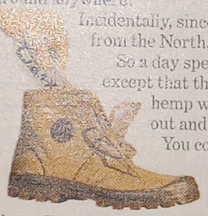

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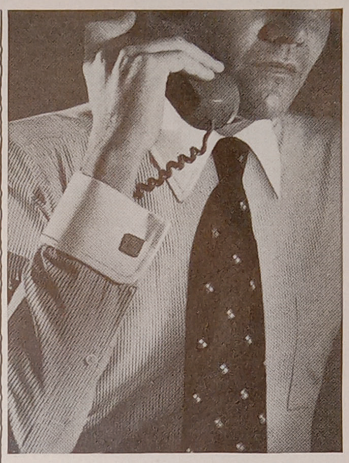
Thomas Tadlock, Allan Kaprow, James Seawright, Otto Piene, and Paik. Paik's segment, the concluding one on the program, lasted seven minutes and was called "Electronic Opera No. 1." While an offscreen pianist played Beethoven's "Moonlight" Sonata and an offscreen Paik periodically advised viewers to close one eye or both eyes ("This is audience-participation TV"), the screen showed double and triple images of a nude go-go girl, President Nixon's face stretching puttylike as he talked about "the brilliant manager of my campaign for the Presidency," three hirsute hippies mugging for the camera, and the dancing-wave pattern looping and rolling and changing color. At the end, Paik's laconic voice was again heard, telling the viewers, "Please follow instructions. Turn off your television set."

The people at WGBH were a little surprised by the go-go dancer, but everyone there was delighted with Paik. Barzyk, of course, was naturally sympathetic to Paik's ideas about "low-fidelity TV": instead of trying always to reproduce images as accurately as possible, Paik said, one could also work to produce original TV images that nobody had ever seen before. Barzyk and Michael Rice, the station's vice-president and program manager, were eager to have Paik return and work at the studio, so when Paik went to them soon afterward and said he needed ten thousand dollars to build a videosynthesizer Barzyk and his associates got it for him. Nobody—not even Barzyk—understood clearly what it was that Paik had in mind. Paik wanted to make a machine that would let him create TV images directly—without involving hordes of technicians and batteries of costly equipment. He had drawn up a rough proposal that unfolded to a length of about fifteen feet, but it made little sense to the WGBH engineers. "Nobody could really tell whether the thing would work or not, partly because nobody really understood Paik's English very well then," Barzyk recalls. "But Nam June breeds a certain kind of energy and strength. You just can't deny Nam June."

Paik spent the next year at the WGBH studios, in Cambridge, working with Shuya Abe, whom he had managed to bring to this country. Paik gives Abe full credit for the engineering of the Paik-Abe videosynthesizer: "Without him I could never have done it." It was, and is, a somewhat ramshackle mechanism ("Is sloppy machine, like me," Paik explains), which is continually being added to and im-



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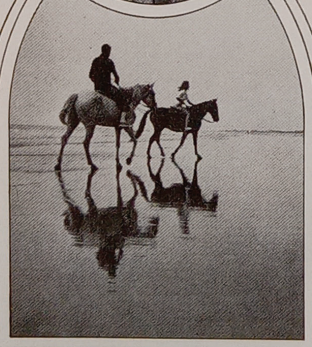

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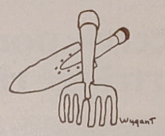
proved by Paik and others. (Paik and Abe have made five models all told, one of which is at WNET's Studio 46, in New York.) What it does is to take the images relayed by black-and-white or color video cameras, sound-signal generators, and other video sources and convert them into an infinite number of color patterns and configurations. It is manually operated by means of a console with knobs, switches, and dials to control the various inputs and the changes that take place in the resulting images. With practice, one can often produce the particular images and configurations one wants, but it is also possible to let the machine generate images randomly, and Paik, who prefers process to results, and who likes to be surprised, is usually inclined to let it take that course. The videosynthesizer can be used by itself to create live programming or videotapes, and it can also be used to transmogrify prerecorded material in ways that are measureless to man.



Actually, the Paik-Abe videosynthesizer is not the only one around, or even necessarily the first—Stephen Beck, in California, and Eric Siegel, in New York, each made a similar device at about the same time—but the Paik-Abe model was the first to be used for broadcast television. In the summer of 1970, Paik used it to produce a four-hour live show for WGBH called "Video Commune," whose sound track was the entire recorded *œuvre* of the Beatles, and whose imagery was provided by Paik, David Atwood, their studio associates, and a large number of perfect strangers whom Paik invited in off the street to play with the controls or to have their features melted or stretched on camera. The program was broadcast over the UHF band, rather than the stronger VHF band, and at one point the visual pyrotechnics succeeded in blowing out a transmitter. Viewer response to the program was so favorable that WGBH repeated it in an edited, one-hour version, as a New Year's Eve present to its viewers—fortunately, without insult to the transmitters.

THE video-art movement was visibly gathering steam by 1970. Dozens of artists had started to work in the medium, several universities had established courses in video, and art galleries and museums were duly taking notice. Howard Wise, the dealer, whose interest was shifting from kinetic-and-light art to art by video, had put on an extremely influential group show in the spring of 1969 called TV as a Creative Medium, with works by twelve artists. Paik's main contribution to this show was "TV Bra for Living Sculpture," a contraption consisting of two three-inch television sets that were worn in lieu of upper clothing by the dauntless Miss Moorman and were wired to Miss Moorman's cello so that her playing generated images on the tiny screens. Paik announced that this was an attempt on his part to "humanize electronics." Miss Moorman, who believes that it is Paik's greatest work, said recently that when she performs in the TV Bra it is "a great, great feeling—so pure and romantic."

The following year, Paik and Miss Moorman demonstrated the TV Bra and Paik displayed other works, old and new, at the Vision and Television exhibition at the Rose Art Museum of Brandeis University—an exhibition that was heavily attended by students and dogs. "Television operates on a very high sound cycle, and that cycle is very attractive to dogs," Paik explained afterward. "We had nearly a hundred TV sets in the museum, and every morning many, many dogs would come." On the last day of the Brandeis show, a representative of the New York State Council on the Arts dropped in and asked Russell Connor, the museum's assistant director and the man responsible for the exhibition, to come to New York for an interview, which led to Connor's becoming the State Council's expert on grants to television artists. Paik sensed that this was a turning point in the development of video art. The following September, he went to spend the year at the California Institute of the Arts, teaching video techniques in a program run by his old friend Allan Kaprow (who had given up the East Coast for the West); somewhat to Kaprow's distress, Paik decided to leave Cal Arts at the end of the spring semester and return to New York. "I say to Allan, 'Look, every artist has once in their life their time. You had your time with "happenings." Next year is video time—I have to be in New York.' "

As it turned out, Paik divided his time in 1971 between New York and Boston. Soon after his four-hour "Video Commune" show at WGBH, he and seven other artists had been commissioned by the Boston Symphony to provide visual accompaniment for a TV program of symphonic highlights. Once again Paik's sequence came last

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on the program, and offered a fairly vivid contrast with the lyrical, predominantly abstract imagery of the other artists. He chose to work with the Boston Symphony's recording of the Beethoven Piano Concerto No. 4 in G Major, and his visual imagery for it included quick cuts of a bust of Beethoven being punched by a man's fist and of a piano (a toy piano shown in closeup, so it filled the screen) catching fire and burning to a crisp. The Boston Symphony was said to be far from pleased.

Paik spent a large part of 1971 working at WGBH on an ambitious hour-long videotape called "A Tribute to John Cage," to mark the composer's sixtieth birthday, which was coming up the following year. Then, early in 1972, when WNET reorganized its experimental workshop as the Television Laboratory and asked video artists to come in on a regular basis, Paik was among the first to be invited. He had a lot to do with the way the Laboratory was set up under its director, David Loxton. He contributed a steady flow of ideas and suggestions, and his "Selling of New York" was the first TV Lab project to be broadcast over WNET. Paik had started this opus with the notion that he wanted to show some of the good things about New York—of which he had become so fond by now that he no longer thought of leaving—but it did not work out quite that way. The program opens with a shot of Miss Moorman in the TV Bra, and then keeps cutting rapidly back and forth between Japanese television commercials and views of a television set on which a commentator (Russell Connor) is reciting facts about New York. The television-within-a-television turns up near a bathtub in which a girl is taking a bath; on a night table beside a bed in which a couple are simultaneously trying to make love and to turn the television off; in a deserted living room where, while Connor is announcing that "the New York police force is now larger than the Army of Denmark," a burglar comes in, yanks out the cord, and steals the set. When the program was shown over WNET, in 1973, several viewers called to ask why their sets were suddenly bringing in Japanese TV; others just wanted to know what the hell was going on.

Paik's admirers at WGBH and WNET look on him as an absurdly comic and wholly engaging personality, an inventive genius, and an amazingly successful promoter of his own ideas. "Nam June is the world's best hus-

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tler," Loxton said not long ago. "A lot of the time, I feel he knows a lot more clearly what he wants to say than he lets on—it's as though he decided not to let the bureaucracy understand him too clearly or they'd step in and louse things up." What his friends at the studios may not have fully grasped is Paik's continuing commitment to the anti-system, anti-formal energies of his Fluxus period. Paik is really undermining the commercial structure of television, according to the art critic Douglas Davis, who is also a video artist. "The TV people think of him as an entertainer, but his humor is tougher than that." Paik's videotapes, up to and including "Global Groove" and the recently shown "Suite (212)," a series of three- to eight-minute vignettes of different aspects of New York City, done in collaboration with video artist Jud Yalkut and others, and seen over WNET at the close of its programming every night in April, are characterized by an ironic wit that is fairly glacial at times, and by all sorts of subversive assaults on familiar patterns of TV viewing. It is the same sort of comedy that pervades his Action music and his performances with Miss Moorman. Miss Moorman has admitted that she feels a little depersonalized when she is performing Paik's compositions. "Sometimes I feel Paik doesn't really think of me as Charlotte Moorman," she said reflectively last spring. "He looks on me as a work of his." This doesn't upset her, because she has absolute faith in Paik's artistic talent. She is extremely proud of the fact that Paik's "TV Cello," a vaguely cellolike construction of three television sets with a string down the middle, on which she uses a regulation bow to produce not cello sounds but "TV Cello sounds," is "the first real innovation in cello design since 1600." She is equally proud of the fact that when she underwent surgery three years ago and could not perform in her regular fashion for several weeks, Paik constructed a "TV Bed" out of eight television sets fastened together, on which she was able to play her cello while lying down. The totally unsmiling concentration and dedication that Miss Moorman brings to her performances with TV Bras, TV Cellos, and TV Beds—the fact that she obviously does not see anything funny in what she is doing—contribute quite a bit to the over-all effect.

So far, Paik is one of the few video artists who have managed to bridge the gap between the gallery-sponsored, limited-distribution, "fine art" video-

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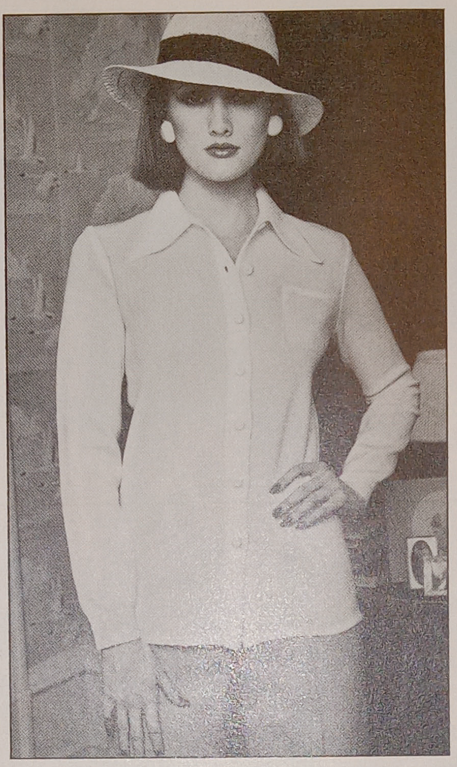

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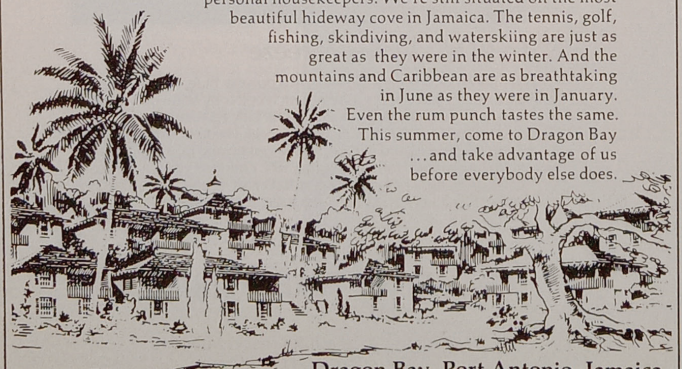

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tapes and the broadcast-oriented work of the television workshops. He has continued to show his doctored TVs and his videotapes at the Galeria Bonino. Though the gallery has yet to sell a Paik TV set, one was stolen from his latest show there, in the winter of 1974, and his "TV Buddha," an authentic and rather fine eighteenth-century Japanese Buddha figure that sits contemplating its own image in a closed-circuit TV set, could easily find a buyer if Paik were willing to sell it, but he isn't. Paik's delicate, calligraphic ink drawings, which look like TV screens after the picture has been lost because of technical difficulties, are being snapped up by European and American dealers, however; his videotapes are in great demand around the country; and a retrospective exhibition of his work—the hallmark of an artist's having arrived—was presented at the Everson Museum, in Syracuse, in 1973.

The "fine art" video people tend to feel that Paik, for all his importance as a pioneer, is not really a very serious artist. A great deal of the video art to be seen now in galleries is almost unbelievably boring—endless repetitions of simple actions such as a hand trying to grab a falling object, or the artist lying on the floor of his studio and talking to himself. Paik's videotapes, by contrast, are often dismissed (or appreciated) as mere entertainment. Paik understands this, and is not bothered by it. "I have a theory about American avant-garde art," he said last spring. "Serious avant-garde art here is always in opposition to American mass culture. In a way, mass culture conditions serious art. For instance, why is it that only in America such intensely boring music has been produced? And films? Because Hollywood is doing too good a job, I think. Popular culture is setting the rules, so you have to define what you do against what they are doing. We want to make more crude if they are perfect, we want to make more boring if they are exciting—you know? Of course, Oriental music is boring, too. But Oriental boring music is wet, moist—very spiritual. American is very dry, like baseball. American boring music is not at all spiritual. La Monte Young tries his best to imitate Oriental aesthetic, but the more he tries to be Oriental the more he becomes American. Another thing—Oriental music was always for the aristocrat, was always rich man's thing. Now America has reached stage where most people are aristocrats. Much richer than Europeans, anyway. Americans need not

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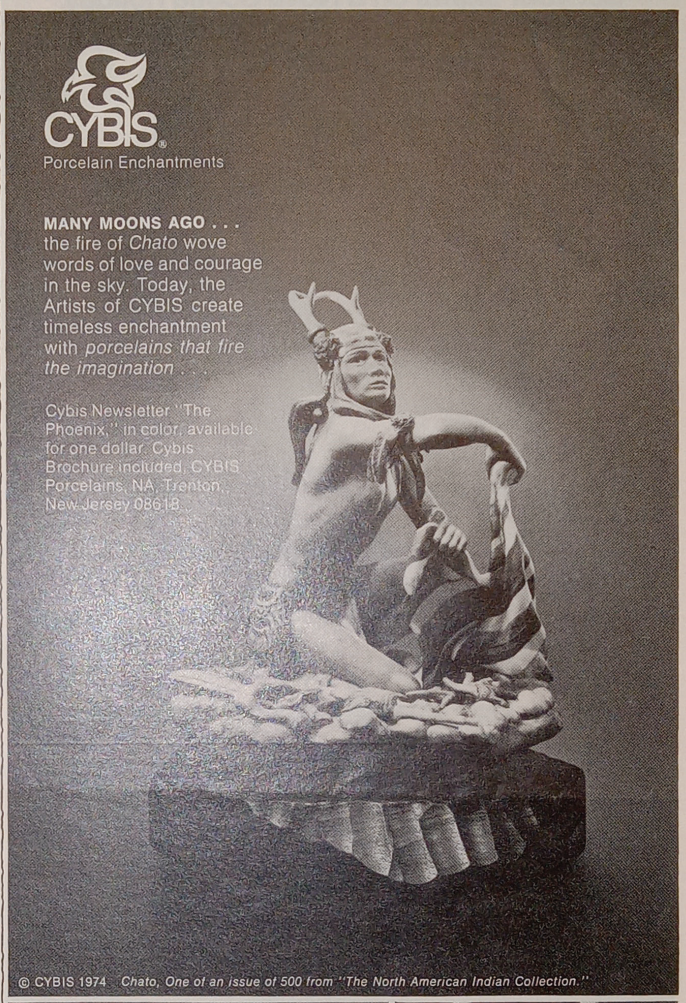
be entertained every second, because they are so rich. They think art can be kind of extension of parties. My first concert at New School here was really crowded like hell. I couldn't do anything. People were just talking together, there was no still moment. I thought it was big mistake, big failure, but afterward people say it was very big success *because* so many people there, including notables. America has in a way this very rich attitude that makes boring, long music possible. But I'm not writing boring music that much. The reason is that I come from very poor country and I am poor. I have to entertain people every second."

Paik himself feels that video art still has a long way to go before its potential emerges. What is taking place today is a widespread exploration of the medium by various groups—visual artists, filmmakers, dancers, musicians—each of which approaches it from a different point of view and often with quite different expectations and a quite different goal. Each group tends to feel, of course, that its approach is the only valid one. This situation reminds Paik of an ancient Chinese story about a monkey who thought he was dancing on the top of the world only to find that he was dancing on the Buddha's palm. "Everyone is trying to define what video is," Paik has observed. "Art critics struggle with that a lot. But I think best thing is not to try to define video. In New York, every art movement is destined to die in five years, but I would like to save video from such quick obsolescence. It is more than fad."

In the future, Paik is convinced, all art will have as its prime function the movement of information. In his view, the artist must become a "humanizing agent" within the vast and proliferating network of information technology, and he still thinks that the best way for this to happen is for the artist to give up his self-serving ego, to become more like the anonymous cathedral builders of the Middle Ages. Although Paik's theories about the future of art and of video technology are sometimes dismissed as so much visionary claptrap, his theorizing is based on a solid intellectual groundwork. A voracious reader of technical data, he is also well informed about contemporary thinking in many different fields, and his studio on Mercer Street, in SoHo, is adrift in scientific papers, television-industry studies and reports, clippings from American, European, and Japanese newspapers and magazines, and books of all kinds—not to mention TV sets in various



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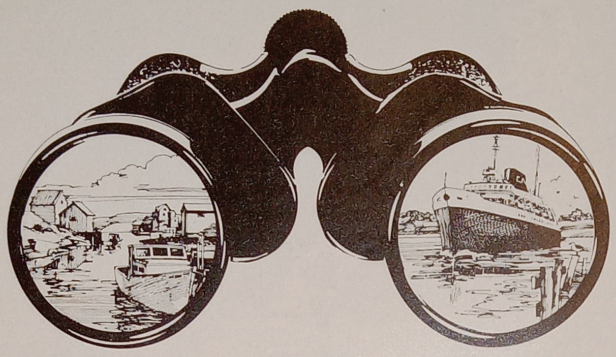

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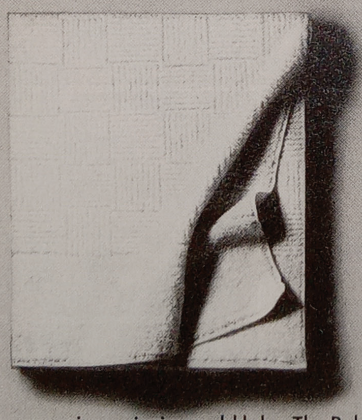

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stages of decomposition or reconstitution. When he wants to cite a fact or a statistic, he can go instantly to the proper stack of papers and dig it out (often causing the stack to subside laterally across the floor). Paik says that by 1985 the picture telephone will be in use throughout the world, in color; by making most travel for business reasons unnecessary, it will contribute substantially to solving the energy crisis. (He has proposed topless answering services for understimulated executives.) The videotape cassette, which is already here, will make possible Paik's "global university"—a place where vast quantities of up-to-date information on every conceivable subject can be stored, with computers to provide instant retrieval, so that a student of any age can pursue his own education at his own pace.

Even more far-reaching effects on society, Paik believes, will result from the development of cable television. "It will definitely come," he said recently. "Rand Corporation thinks cable is very good for long-range investment. Nobody really making money in cable now, but cable lobby in Washington is *very* strong—they snap up congressmen like nothing." In a recent report to the Rockefeller Foundation, which has retained him as a consultant on communications, he pointed out that in the late forties and early fifties, when the Federal Communications Commission was offering relatively inexpensive licenses for television stations on the strong VHF band, the intellectual and academic communities looked the other way; consequently, nearly all the licenses went to commercial interests. With the advent of cable TV, he went on, approximately sixty new channels have become available for programming, and, because of the superiority of cable transmission, the signal on each of these is at least as strong as the signal on VHF. Will the intellectuals continue to ignore this powerful resource? Paik would like to see at least one new cable channel in each community set aside for work by video artists. Other channels could be reserved for municipal or community affairs, for children's programming, for theatre or music or dance. There could even be all-Mozart stations, as Paik once suggested, or all-Beethoven, or all-Cage. But unless somebody acted rather quickly, he warned, history would repeat itself and the licenses would go once again to the commercial interests—the polluters of the videosphere. "I wish all our consultants could be as productive as he is," How-

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ard Klein said not long ago. "With all his whimsicality, Paik can go straight to the essentials of complicated matters with great logic and force."

Paik, of course, has had his problems in dealing with the establishment. "Only reason I survived this long at WNET is I had underground outlet," he conceded last month. "I have a lot of frustration to work within system. A *lot* of frustration. So when I get mad at them I don't fight—I yield to them, and then go and do some stupid thing in small place which satisfies me so that I can work with them again. Underground outlet is my safety valve. I like being world's most famous bad pianist. But I also like to do NET because it is important, is where I can maybe influence society."

After a moment's reflection, Paik went on, "We are now at stage of ancient Egypt with hieroglyphics. Until recently, TV equipment is so expensive that only the priests can use it. And there is *constant* effort made by networks and by TV unions to keep production costs high. That is classical way of monopoly capital—you know? I want to find ways to cut costs so it can be opened up to others—many others. Now we have color portapak—costs three thousand dollar in Tokyo, six thousand here, but will come down. And with use of computers cost of editing videotape will become much cheaper. Problem is not really Socialism or capitalism but technology, you know—how we manage that. For instance, technological forecasting, future-research—I am very interested in that. They *need* us artists, to make that sort of information available to public. Even New York *Times* will not print Rand Corporation Report, because it is so boring. Like McLuhan say, we are antenna for changing society. But not only antenna—we also have output capacity, capacity to humanize technology. My job is to see how establishment is working and to look for little holes where I can get my fingers in and tear away walls. And also try not to get too corrupt."

—Calvin Tomkins

•

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August 2, 1974

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The video art movement, which has been in high gear for about three years now, can have come as a surprise to practically no one. Most of the people who are trying to turn the cathode ray tube into an art medium belong to the under thirty, or TV, generation, which means, according to current industry projections, that each of them has spent, on the average, about fifteen thousand hours watching television. Television has been their landscape, in a way, and it would appear inevitable that they should want to make use of it. Until quite recently, the huge costs of working with television equipment made it all but impossible for anyone outside the commercial TV studios to tap into the medium, but with the marketing in the mid-sixties of relatively inexpensive, portable videotape recorders the territory suddenly opened up and the artists, who had been toeing the line in anticipation, lit out for the new electronic frontier.

More than a dozen New York art galleries are currently handling "personal" videotapes by artists. Leo Castelli's downtown gallery, which last season merged its video operations with the Sonnabend Gallery in the same building, ~~distributes~~ shows and distributes videotapes by twenty

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different artists, while Howard Wise, who gave up his fifty-seventh street gallery in 1971 to concentrate on helping video art get started, handles the distribution of work by thirty more through his Electronics Arts Intermix, Inc. Artists' videotapes, most of which are available on cassettes that can be viewed on special monitor-receivers equipped for that purpose, are leased, for the most part, to museums and to university and college art departments, but requests come in also from high schools and community groups throughout the country, and there are even a few early-bird private collectors who buy them outright. Publications such as "Radical Software" have sprung up, devoted to the "alternative" TV movement. The Museum of Modern Art's "Open Circuits" conference on video art last winter drew participants from as far away as Brazil and Australia, and next year's Guggenheim International at the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburg is to be devoted entirely to video art. Concurrently with the action in galleries and museums, moreover, the three most active educational TV stations in the country -- WGBH-TV in Boston, KQED-TV in San Francisco, and WNET-TV in New York -- have established experimental television workshops where artists are invited to work with the complex and sophisticated hardware of broadcast TV. The results might startle regular viewers of the Lawrence Welk Show, but they have met nevertheless with generally encouraging reactions from the critics, and funding for the workshops -- largely by the Rockefeller Foundation -- seems reasonably well assured. In the wings, meanwhile, lies the glittering and often-delayed promise of cable TV, or CATV -- the promise of as many as eighty new channels in the UHF band, with hundreds of thousands of viewing hours to be filled somehow, a vast empty canvas not yet smeared and scumbled over by The Sponsor. It was "historical necessity," as Nam June Paik put it in 1969, that "someday artists will work with capacitors, resistors and semi-conductors as they work today with brushes, violins, and junk."

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Nam June Paik is slightly embarrassed about being known as the George Washington of video art. A smallish, rather self-effacing Korean whose English is still, after ten years in this country, so impervious to the definite article that it is hard to understand him on first or even second meeting, Paik shunned the spotlight at the Museum of Modern Art's "Open Circuits" conference, which was in a sense dedicated to his work and which took its title from a statement that he had published in 1963. When Paik, with his nervously oscillating eyebrows and his woollen stomach warmer, came up to the front of the room to speak, he simply introduced other artists in the movement and then showed his recent videotape, "Global Groove." No doctrinal statements, no manifestoes, no fuss. It is a fact, however, that Paik began thinking about video as an art form as far back as 1959, when he mentioned it in a letter to John Cage, and that his 1963 exhibition at the Galerie Parnass in Wuppertal, Germany, was the first show of video art anywhere. This was several years before the advent of lightweight video equipment, of course, but in those days Paik was not thinking in terms of cameras or recorders, he was thinking solely in terms of the image on the home screen. He went in through the back of the set and played around with that image, changing voltages and circuits, warping and distorting the picture and re-introducing a lot of the technical bugs and flaws that television engineers had spent years trying to eliminate. "It was Paik who saw that the way the signal is created on the monitor presented all sorts of opportunities for new images," David Loxton, the director of WNET's Television Laboratory, said recently. "That vision obviously made everyone stop and think. You could really make TV just by manipulating signals electronically, without all this insane two-thousand-dollars-a-minute business of studio production."

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Many of the gallery artists now working in video are not interested in signal manipulation at all -- they use the equipment simply to record activities, processes or environments in much the same way that a movie camera would do it. The range of possibilities for signal manipulation is virtually limitless, however, thanks in part to an electronic device called the videosynthesizer, which Paik and his Japanese collaborator, Shuya Abe, designed and built in 1968, and image manipulation is one of the areas that makes video an infinitely more flexible medium than cinema. In the hands of Paik, Ron Hays, Ed Emshwiller and other practitioners, the synthesizer can produce an ever-changing kaleidoscope of shapes and colors on the screen -- shapes and colors unlike anything anyone has ever seen before. It can superimpose as many as four different images without losing definition; cause the features of live announcers and other unsuspecting subjects to vibrate, melt, change color, or spread laterally across the screen; and generally turn the familiar screen into an electronic canvas for an artist whose brush is really composed of light. Watching television is not the same experience as watching a movie. Instead of seeing light reflected from a screen, the video viewer looks directly into the light source, which is why the colors in color TV are so luminous. "Film is chemicals, TV is electronics," as Paik points out. "There are something like four million phosphor dots on the color television screen every second; it is just like Seurat -- you mix them in your eye. In film you take from reality, in TV you produce reality -- real electronic color." ~~Psychological differences exist as well. "The big difference between film and video is that you need darkness for film and you have to stop other activities, but with video you can do everything and still watch it -- it's [illegible] a continuation of your life," Paik observed last spring.~~

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Psychological differences exist as well. As Marshall McLuhan has pointed out, a new medium usually begins by imitating the content of the medium that preceded it: the first automobiles looked like horse-drawn broughams, the first motion pictures were filmed stage plays. For more than thirty years most of the dramatic entertainment on television has been little more than shrunken cinema, movies squeezed down to the dimensions and the commercially-dictated time structures of the home screen -- which is one reason that even the movies made especially for television seem so drained of life and so blatantly artificial. The cinematic model simply won't work on the tube. But as art in our time becomes more and more a question of information, of dealing with our incredible public reality, the validity of TV as an art medium grows increasingly evident. "The big difference between film and video is that you need darkness for film and you have to stop other activities," Paik observed last spring, "but with video you can do everything and still watch -- it's a continuation of your life."

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The nature of the medium, and the fact that videotape, which can be erased and reused any number of times, is a great deal cheaper to work with than film, have lured film-makers as well as artists to experiment with it. Shirley Clarke, who used to make film documentaries ("Portrait of Jason"), now presides over a studio where closed-circuit TV is used as a form of group therapy. Ed Emshwiller, considered the finest technician among the so-called underground group of film-makers, has been working almost exclusively in television of late. Although it has become modish for art critics to state that, so far, the video movement has yet to produce anything resembling a major work of art, the TV reviewers have responded enthusiastically to Emshwiller's work on Channel 13 and to Paik's recently televised "Global Groove," a high-velocity collage of images ranging from Japanese Pepsi-Cola commercials to tap dancers to views of the Living Theater performing "Paradise Now," all subjected to surreal distortions and overlaid by the light-painting techniques of the Paik-Abe videosynthesizer.

Paik himself uses the videosynthesizer less and less these days. He is pleased that others are using it, and he says, typically, that they do it much better than he does. Paik has always been much more interested in processes than in results, and at the moment, as an artist-in-residence at WNET's Television Laboratory and a consultant on television to the Rockefeller Foundation, he is involved in a great many different processes, not all of which even involve television. But video remains the basis of his wide-ranging and somewhat visionary cast of thought. "I believe in timing," Paik said last spring. "Somehow you have to be at a certain point at a certain time. You have to 'meet the time,' as they say in Chinese history. I start in 1960, first time television sets become cheap, become second-hand like junk. I buy thirteen second-hand sets.

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I didn't have any preconceived idea. Nobody had put two frequencies into one place, so I just do that, horizontal and vertical, and this absolutely new thing comes out. I make mistake after mistake, and it comes out positive. That is story of my whole life."

One explanation for Paik's success as a video pioneer may be that he came to television by way of music. Visual artists, painters and sculptors, are accustomed to filling up space; they do not always understand how to use time, as a great many of their "performance pieces" in recent yearschave made all too painfully evident. Paik was trained as a musician, however, and no matter what else may be said of his performance pieces and videotapes, hardly anyone finds them tedious. "My experimental television is not always interesting but not always uninteresting," Paik observed,on the occasion of his 1963 show in Wuppertal. It was, he went on to say, "like nature, which is beautiful not because it changes beautifully, but simply because it changes."

His musical education, though thorough, took place largely on the sly. In Korea, Paik has explained, professional artists and musicians have no status at all. "We have expression, 'man of letters,' same as here, and if a man of letters writes music or does painting, that's O.K. But professional musician is nothing." Paik's family, which was middle class and periodically well-to-do, would not have looked with favor on his musical studies, but the family did not learn about them until it was too late. "We are really one of the most corrupted families in Korea," according to Paik, who was born in Seoul in 1932. "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

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in 1945 they become 'people's factories.' It was all luck and unluck. Sometimes I felt I was on wrong side, because I had such radical thoughts. In 1950 we were on refugee train, and bombing started. We get out, and I really don't know which side I am on. Then I thought, well -- enlightenment! -- I will just look at everything from now on like baseball, you know, nothing serious. I became quite cynical." Paik and his family did manage to escape the country in 1950, and, because of South Korea's stringent military conscription law, he could technically be arrested as a draft dodger if he ever went back.

The family went first to Hong Kong, where Paik's father dabbled in ginseng root business, and then to Tokyo, where Paik, the youngest of five children, entered Tokyo University. He took courses in philosophy and history and esthetics, secretly studied western music (Oriental music was not even being taught), and graduated in 1956 with a degree in esthetics. Paik's two older brothers were businessmen by then, but their father allowed Paik to go off to Germany, ostensibly to work for his doctorate in philosophy. "He liked the idea that one son gets PhD." Graduate work at the University of Munich and the Conservatory in Freiburg gave him a thorough grounding in music history and theory and in piano technique, although, as Paik tells it, he was such a timid student that he never even considered the possibility of performing in public. "I was always very serious straught-A student, but so timid that when I played in front of my teacher, Chopin or Bach, my tempo would go up and down, up and down."

What interested Paik far more than Chopin or Bach even then was the music of the twentieth century. As a high-school student in Seoul he had tried for three years, unsuccessfully, to find a recording to Arnold Schonberg's "Verklarte Nacht," which he had read about in a copy of Time. He did manage

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with great diligence to find a recording to Stravinsky's "Firebird" -- "I will never forget the red label with Stokowski conducting Philadelphia Orchestra" -- but not "The Rites of Spring." "Then, when I got to Tokyo, I heard on radio some music with girl weeping, and I said, 'Oh, must be Schonberg.' It was 'Pierrot Lunaire,' first time I hear it. Such a big event for me."

Gefmany in the fifties was a center ~~[illegible]~~ of the newest developments in music, most of which had to do with electronic composition. Karlheinz Stockhausen, Gyorgy Ligeti, Mauricio Kagel and other avant-garde composers were working at the Studio for Electronic Music that had been established by Radio Cologne, and one of Paik's teachers at the University of Munich, Wolfgang Fortner, strongly urged him to go there. Paik took his advice and enrolled in the University of Cologne, but for the first year there he was too shy to approach ~~the dynamic young Stockhausen~~ any of the other young composers. He was writing music, ~~but~~ not too confidently. He composed a string quartet which "started out Bartok, became Schonberg, and ended Webern." He also wrote a composition based on a 9th century Korean poem, in which he included certain tape-recorded "collage" elements such as water sounds, a baby's babbling, and snatches of Tchaikovsky. Later he ~~began~~ edged further into the electronic field with taped compositions of himself chanting or shouting. And it was at about this juncture, in 1958, that he met John Cage, an event that he considers the turning point in his life.

Cage, the irrepressible American avant-gardist whom Schonberg once described as "not a composer but an inventor of genius," had decided by then that electronic music was "dead as a doornail." Cage had noticed that the audiences at concerts of all-electronic music invariably went to sleep. He believed that the healthier tendencies in all the arts then were moving in the direction of theater, and he made sure that his own compositions

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gave the listeners something to look at as well as listen to; most of these activities were ~~[illegible]~~ dictated, like his music, by chance operations, and the results were often somewhat hilarious. Paik had heard about Cage while he was still living in Tokyo. He had read "Silence," the first collection of Cage's extremely influential writings, and shortly afterward he had been both astounded and pleased to hear ~~his~~ Professor Nomura, who taught music history at the university and whose special area was the Gregorian Chant, name Cage's "String Quartet" among the ten best musical works of the twentieth century. ~~[illegible]~~

When Cage came to Cologne on a concert and lecture tour in 1958, Paik ~~Cage~~ took in the performance and later went to call on the composer at his hotel. He was rather shocked to find Cage polishing his shoes. It did not seem to Paik that someone with Cage's attitude toward music should waste any time on details of personal appearance, nor did he approve of the fact that Cage had worn a dark blue suit and a necktie when he performed. They got along well enough in spite of this, however, and discovered that they were both engrossed just then in Mallarmé's writings on chance. Paik asked Cage whether he meant to be funny when he did things such as blowing whistles or rattling egg-beaters on stage. Cage replied that he did not set out deliberately to be funny -- the whistles, for example, in the collage-piece called "Music Walk," had simply been a means of making sounds while his hands were occupied in making other sounds -- but that if something turned out to be funny in performance, as the whistles had, then he ~~xk~~ could accept that without difficulty. In general, he said, he preferred laughter to tears.

All this had a hugely liberating effect on Paik. Cage, who is not always comforted by the work of people he has inspired, tends now to belittle his influence on Paik. "I don't believe in all this business of

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people influencing other people," he said recently. "Maybe Nam June's meeting me made it possible for him to go on and do the things he was going to do sooner or later anyway, but only because it was already in him to do do them. But the fact is that he took my ideas into areas where I would never have gone." In the pieces that Paik began to compose after 1958, there was often an element of violence that was entirely foreign to anything in Cage. Paik, the timid student who could not conceive of playing the piano in public, now found it within his powers to compose and pefform a work called "Hommage à John Cage," in which he caused an upright piano to tip over and fall with a crash on the stage (Stockhausen, watching from the front row, leaped up and started to lift it back upright again, until ~~Paik~~ dissuaded by Paik; they have been close friends ever since). In "One for Violin," Paik stood facing the audience, holding by the neck a violin which he would raise slowly with both hands -- so slowly that the movement was all but imperceptible; when the violin ~~it~~ was above his head, he would bring it down (fortissimo) on the table in front of him, smashing it to smithereens. He performed these and other pieces in small galleries around Cologne and in the atelier of Mary Bauermeister, a painter friend, and later in museums and concert halls in Oslo, Copenhagen, and Stockholm. Paik also performed works by Cage and others, and he was enormously encouraged when a German music critic referred to him in print as "the world's most famous bad pianist."

In 1960, when Cage returned to Europe for a series of lectures and performances, Paik was ready with a new piece entitled "Etude for Pianoforte." Cage recalls the event vividly. "It is hard to describe why his performances are so terrifying," Cage said not long ago. "You get the feeling ~~think~~ very clearly that anything can happen, even physically dangerous things." In the "Etude for Pianoforte," whose premiere was in Mary Bauermeister's studio, Paik played some Chopin on the piano, broke off weeping, got up and

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threw himself upon the innards of another, eviscerated piano that lay scattered about the floor, then picked up a wickedly long pair of scissors and leaped down to where Cage, the pianist David Tudor, and Karlheinz Stockhausen were sitting in the front row. He removed Cage's suit jacket and started to slash away at his shirt with the scissors -- later, he explained that he had intended to cut off the shirttail, but that when he saw that Cage was not wearing an undershirt he took pity on him, and decided instead to cut off his necktie at the knot. Next he poured a bottle of shampoo over Cage's head and also over David Tudor's (when Stockhausen edged nervously away, Paik shouted "Not for you!"). When the bottle was empty, Paik and both Cage and Tudor were fully lathered, Paik forced his way back through the crowded room and ran out the door. Everyone sat as though stunned, Cage recalls, for several minutes. Finally the telephone rang, and someone answered; it was Paik, calling to say that the concert was over.

Performances of this sort, with their clear echoes of the Dadaist manifestations in the nineteen twenties, had a good deal in common with the events called "Happenings" that were going on in New York about this same time, in small galleries and artists' lofts. The Happenings were in one sense an outgrowth of the process-oriented, gestural "action painting" of Jackson Pollock and other artists of the New York School, and the most prominent Happeners were visual artists such as Claes Oldenburg, Jim Dine, Red Grooms, Robert Whitman, and Allan Kaprow (who coined the term "Happening"). It was generally acknowledged, however, that the first true Happening had been a collaborative event organized by John Cage and Merce Cunningham at Black Mountain College in 1952, and Cage's influence on the whole phenomenon was strong and pervasive. A number of young New York musicians, dancers, and artists, many of whom had attended Cage's classes in experimental music at The New

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School (as had Kaprow himself), had also become interested in doing performance pieces that could be described as "action music," but they lacked the gallery facilities of the better-known artists and they had a hard time finding performance space until 1961, when George Maciunas took up their cause. Maciunas, a Lithuanian-born typographer who seemed to have his hand in any number of money-losing operations, was then a part-owner of a Madison Avenue art gallery called the AG Gallery, and in 1961 he sponsored there a series of about a dozen "events" by Dick Higgins, Al Hansen, George Brecht, La Monte Young, and others of his friends. Maciunas and Jackson MacLow, a poet, also took over the design and printing of a publication called "An Anthology," edited by the composer La Monte Young, which included "scripts" for Happening-type events by more than TK contributors, including Nam June Paik, whose European performances Maciunas had heard about.

When the AG Gallery folded in the spring of 1961, Maciunas went to Europe with the idea of founding a periodical devoted to what he considered the rapidly changing directions in all the arts. The periodical was to be called "Fluxus" (for work "in flux"), but it never got off the ground. Instead, Maciunas organized a series of "Fluxus Festivals" around Europe -- in Wiesbaden, Copenhagen, Paris, Dusseldorf, Stockholm, Nice, and London, with a fluctuating troupe that usually included Paik, Dick Higgins and his wife, Alison Knowles, the Europeans Wolf Vostell, Ben Vautier, and Daniel Spoerri, and various other unfettered spirits. Fluxus events tended to be more Dada in spirit than Happenings, which were primarily visual. La Monte Young's "Composition, 1960, #7" called for a singer and an accompanist to sound the same two notes (B and F#) continuously for one hour. Wolf Vostell, a blond giant from Cologne, did a piece in which he hammered toys to pieces, erased pages of a magazine,

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broke lights bulbs against a piece of glass, and then threw cake at the broken glass. Higgins' "Danger Music N.o. 3" had Alison Knowles shave Higgins' head and fling political pamphlets at the audience. The esthetic behind all this was somewhat elusive. George Brecht tried to elucidate it at one point by stating that Fluxus was against the exclusiveness and the elitism of art -- anything can be art and anyone can do it, Brecht wrote; "Therefore, art-amusement must be simple, amusing, unpretentious, concerned with insignificances, require no skill or countless rehearsals, have no commodity or institutional value." It could be said that Brecht was speaking only for himself, inasmuch as the Fluxus people denied that they were part of a "movement" or even that they shared similar ideas and goals, but the anti-art, neo-Dada bias of the members was never in much doubt.

Paik's performances differed from those of the other Fluxus people in ~~xxxxxx~~ that they were hardly ever boring, intentionally or otherwise. Everything that Paik did on stage was done with an excrutiating and highly theatrical intensity, and there was often that sense of physical danger that had frightened Cage. Allan Kaprow described him as a "cultural terrorist," and Higgins went so far as to criticize his "joy in the perverse." Paik hammered nails into pianos, or attacked them with a carpenter's plane ("People have idea that piano is very expensive, very sacred," he explained; "I was not thinking about destruction at all"). He crawled underneath the instrument and licked the dust from the pedals. He also composed works that would now qualify as "conceptual" art, including a score for a symphony "to last one million years," and ~~xx~~ a long series of correspondence events that involved mailing pennies to people in various parts of the world. His return address at this point was the Institute for Avant-Garde Hinduism, which he had founded and of which he was the sole

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member ("I like Hinduism," Paik once said. "Is not so restricted as other religions, and they like sex, too"). Most people had trouble understanding him. He spoke six languages besides Korean, all of them badly. Nobody even knew he had a secret studio on the outskirts of Cologne, where he and an engineer friend spent endless hours taking apart and rewiring thirteen second-hand television sets.

Television pictures are produced by a flow of electrons moving in straight lines across the phosphor-coated surface of a cathode ray tube. Paik and his friend interfered with this flow of electrons in a variety of ways. They altered the horizontal input to make the image stretch laterally across the screen. They used sound waves to warp the image, and they reversed the black and white controls to make negative images. Odd, distorted shapes floated, unfixed, through fields of electronic static. Paik hooked up one set to a microphone, so that when you talked into the mike the image would jump around on the screen. It was all pretty complicated electronically -- nothing as simple as the blurring or tumbling effects that you get inadvertantly by fiddling with the horizontal and vertical controls. Paik learned television circuitry backwards and forwards. "I still did not consider myself a visual artist," he has said of that period, "but I knew there was something to be done in television, and nobody else was doing it, so I said why not make it my job?" If it had not been for television, Paik said, he might still be breaking up pianos.

Paik's thirteen doctored TV sets were presented to the public in the spring of 1963, at the Galerie Parnass in Wuppertal. Nobody bought one, and the freshly slaughtered ox's head that Paik hung over the door to the gallery attracted more attention than the electronics. Soon afterward, Paik closed his Cologne studio and went back to Tokyo. He wanted to

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experiment with color television, which was not available in Europe then. In Tokyo he met a man named Hideo Uchida, an electronics wizard who was interested in using FM radio to test for extra-sensory perception. Uchida introduced Paik to a young Japanese electronics engineer named Shuya Abe, who became Paik's principal collaborator. Together they interfered with electron flows in color sets, and Paik discovered to his delight that it was literally impossible to control the results because each set worked a little differently. A true disciple of Cage, Paik did not want to make anything that would be a mere reflection of his own personality. What he was after was indeterminacy -- the image created by chance -- and he found that the behavior of electrons in a color television set was truly indeterminate. Paik and Abe also built an electronically controlled, bi-sexual, six-foot robot that walked, talked, moved its arms, and excreted white beans. In his spare moments Paik tried to learn something about Oriental music and Oriental religion, neither of which had interested him at all until he met Cage. He spent three days in a Zen monastery near Kamakura, where he was beaten repeatedly by the head monk. "There were twenty or thirty people there, all sitting facing walls," Paik recalls. "In charge was monk with a long stick. We were not supposed to move, even if a mosquito bit. Every so often, monk would hit somebody with his stick, usually me. Why me? It made big noise but didn't really hurt. Anyway that was slightly unhappy three days."

Paik was planning to return to Germany after his year in Tokyo, but he decided to spend six months in the U.S. first. America had held no interest for him before -- he had once been offered a scholarship to Dartmouth, but Germany seemed to be the place for new music, and besides, as he put it, "I knew that Dartmouth was not Yale." In 1964, though, he wanted to investigate what had struck him, from afar, as the curious

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"flatness" of American culture.

The noise and the late summer heat of New York City astonished him. "New York was as ugly as Dusseldorf," he said, "and as dirty as Paris." He stayed with Dick Higgins for a few days, then got a room at the Broadway Central Hotel (the hotel that collapsed in 1973), where the carpet in his room was so filthy that he had to cover it with newspapers before he could sleep. Paik hated New York at first. He hated the dirt, and he also hated the glamour of the uptown art galleries and the spirit of commercialism that seemed to dominate the whole art scene. Even the New York artists seemed stand-offish to him. "The key to Fluxus was that artists were killing individual egos," Paik said recently. "At least that was how I interpreted it. But in New York artists have very big egos. I was never really anti-art, but I was anti-ego. Post-industrial society will be a kind of ego-less society, is what I think. Many people now are giving up acquisitiveness in terms of money and material comfort; next stage is to give up acquisitiveness in fame. Of course, Fluxus people including myself are vain and do have ego, I know that. Is very, very hard." Within a few weeks of his arrival, at any rate, Paik had made his presence felt in a typically disturbing fashion.

As the centerpiece of a festival of avant-garde music at Judson Hall, the festival's youthful organizer, Charlotte Moorman, had scheduled four performances of Karlheinz Stockhausen's "Originale," a theater event in which Paik had appeared prominently when it was done in Europe. (Stockhausen had told Ms. Moorman that she could do the piece only on condition that Nam June Paik's part was played by Nam June Paik, and Ms. Moorman, who had never heard of Paik and thought he was in Europe anyway, was wondering how whether to try to reach him there when Paik called her. He had arrived a few days before, had heard about the production, and would be happy to

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recreate his role. Paik's role consisted of covering his head with shaving cream and rice, slowly unrolling a long Chinese scroll, plunging his head into a pail of water, screaming, and playing the piano; for the New York production he added his electronic robot, which had come over with him from Tokyo. On the fourth and final night, just as Paik was starting his performance, three well-dressed young men rose from the front row of the audience, came up on stage, handcuffed Paik to a metal scaffolding there, and then disappeared out the back of the set. The audience thought it was part of the performance. Paik made plaintive sounds, and Charlotte Moorman, terrified, called the police. Remembering suddenly that they were breaking a number of municipal ordinances (for one thing, the cast included a live chimpanzee without a leash), she called the police station back to tell them not to bother coming, but they were already on their way. The police arrived a few minutes later, freed Paik, found the perpetrators, whom nobody in the cast had ever seen before, and asked whether Paik wanted to press charges. Paik said no. A good many people in the audience thought all this was probably part of the show, too.

The meeting between Paik and Charlotte Moorman was auspicious for both parties. Although they have never been romantically involved with one another -- Ms. Moorman is happily married, and Paik now lives with a pretty Japanese video artist named Shigeko Kubota -- virtually all of Paik's performance pieces since 1964 have been written for Ms. Moorman, whose indefatigable dedication to his work and to the work of other advanced composers once led Edgard Varese to refer to her as "the Jeanne d'Arc of New Music." In her service to the new, Ms. Moorman has travelled rather a long distance from her musical origins. Born in Little Rock, Arkansas, where she began studying the 'cello at the age of ten. She took her BA in music at Centenary College in Shreveport, went on to get her masters at

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the University of Texas, and then proceded to Juilliard in New York, where she studied with Leonard Rose and Ivan Galamian. She spent a summer at Galamian's Meadowmount School of Music, considered the best in the world for string players. While at Juilliafd, she became a regular member of the American Symphony Orchestra, under Leopold Stokowski, and also of the Boccherini Players, a chamber music group. To gain concert experience Ms. Moorman performed as a soloist with any number of lesser symphonic groups, and it was during one such concert, in darkest New Jersey, while performing the Kabelevsky 'Cello Concerto for the thirty-sixth time in public, that Ms. Moorman caught herself wondering whether she had locked the door to her apartment and whether she had turned off the gas stove. This led her, in turn, to wonder whether a career in traditional music was precisely what she wanted.

About this time, in 1961, Ms. Moorman and a friend of hers at Juilliard, a Japanese student named Yoko Ono, moved into an apartment together on West End Avenue. Both of then had recently been separated from their first husbands -- in Ms. Moorman's case, a double bass player who had been her childhood sweatheart in Little Rock. Yoko Ono was the daughter of a wealthy Tokyo banking family. She and her estranged husband, a Japanese music student named Toshi Ichiyanagi, were thoroughly immersed in the musical avant-garde in New York, and it was not long before Ms. Moorman found herself becoming thoroughly immersed in it, too. A year before, Ms. Moorman had managed to arrange for the Town Hall debut of a young Japanese pianist named Kenjii Kobayashi, a friend of Yoko's; she did this by persuading an impressario named Norman J. Seaman to sponsor the event, and then going around to Isamu Noguchi and other well-known Japanese-Americans and persuading them to put up the money. In the fall of 1961, Ms. Moorman got Seaman to sponsor a rather different

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sort of concert by Yoko Ono and her friends, a group of musicians, poets, and dancers that included La Monte Young, Philip Corner, Joseph Byrd, Jackson MacLow, Yvonne Rainer, Jonas Mekas, and George Brecht. Seated on a toilet on the stage at Carnegie Recital Hall that evening, with her back to the audience, making "non-'cello sounds" on her 'cello as the score indicated ~~she, Ono had requested~~, Ms. Moorman again had cause to wonder whether her long musical education was being properly applied. But she felt that the event was interesting, somehow, and she did not think about the gas stove while performing. She went on to perform in other avant-garde events, and then in 1963, without realizing what she was getting into, she put her formidable energy and persuasiveness to work in organizing a one-week festival of new music, which the steely-nerved Norman Seaman again agreed to sponsor, at Judson Hall. This was the start of what has been, ever since, an annual New York event.

The 1963 festival was all music -- or what went by that description in avant-garde circles -- by Cage, La Monte Young, Morton Feldman, Frederic Rzevsky, and others. The dividing line between music and other forms was under heavy assault, however, and when Ms. Moorman put together the second festival in September, 1964, she was only to happy to broaden its scope. Stockhausen's "Originale," the main feature of that series, was more Happening than music, and the annual avant-garde festival has become since then a catch-all for just about every far-out activity that anyone involved can think up. Some people feel that Ms. Moorman has found her true vocation as the organizer of these events. "Charlotte's real talent is for publicity," according to Cage, who usually vows not to take part in the festival but then succumbs to Ms. Moorman's relentless urging. Ms. Moorman herself takes great pride in the festival, but she ~~xxxx~~ believes that her work as Nam June Paik's leading interpreter is of equal importance. "Paik made Moorman a star, in a sense, and Moorman made

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possible Paik's long-postponed desire to bring sex to music.

"Sex has been a main theme in art and literature," Paik said last spring. "Why not in music? Why should music be fifty years behind? In Cologne, I had idea for a concert where 'Moonlight Sonata' is played by woman nude. I thought it would be very beautiful to do this in Germany. But I couldn't find anyone to do it. Piano players are very middle-class, it seems. In my 'Etude for Piano,' I wanted to have girl who would take off many pairs of panties. I even tried to get prostitutes, but none of them would agree." Charlotte Moorman had some difficulty at first with Paik's ideas, but she got over it. Soon after their meeting, he composed his "'Cello Sonata No. 1 For Adults Only," which Ms. Moorman performed at The New School in January, ~~1964~~ 1965. In this work Ms. Moorman, a rather small girl with a full figure and a totally serious manner of performing, starts out, fully gowned, by playing a few measures of the Prelude to Bach's Third 'Cello Suite; she stops, removes an article of clothing, and resumes playing; stops again, removes something else, and continues alternately playing and removing until she is down to a pair of bikini underpants. Paik's next composition for her was "Variations on a Theme by Saint-Saens," which had its premiere at the third avant-garde festival. In this one, Ms. Moorman plays the first half of ~~Gounod's~~ Saint-Saens' "The Swan," gets up and submerges herself in an oil drum filled with water, then returns dripping wet to finish the piece. Sometimes she performs this in an evening gown, and sometimes she wears nothing but a covering of clear plastic. Ms. Moorman said recently that she enjoys performing this piece because she is a Scorpio and her sign is water. Paik says she inevitably plays much better after her immersion. Neither Paik nor Ms. Moorman intend for the piece to seem comic. "In Korea," Paik has said, "being artist is bad enough. To be

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immersion. Both Paik and Ms. Moorman ~~say~~ claim that the piece is not meant to seem comic, although Paik, who laughs a lot, is inclined to laugh when discussing it. "In Korea," Paik has said, "being artist is bad enough. To be comedian is even worse."

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~~comedien is even worse.~~"

Paik and Moorman took their repertoire abroad that summer, and presented it to variously appreciative audiences in Reykjavik, Paris, Cologne, Frankfurt, Aachen, Berlin, and Florence. The excitable Florentines rioted when Ms. Moorman came out in clear plastic, and the police had to be called to restore order. In Berlin, they came close to being arrested for performing Paik's "Robot Opera" in front of the Brandenburg Gate. In this work, Ms. Moorman sits on the back of a crouching artist (any artist will do) and plays the 'cello, while another artist lies on the ground at her feet with the 'cello's ferrule held in his mouth, and while Paik's robot marches to and fro. The armed guards near the Berlin Wall had not been warned ahead of time, and rifles were cocked in nervous anticipation. Ms. Moorman also performed works by Cage and by Yoko Ono (one of the crowd-pleasers was Yoko's "Cut Piece," in which members of the audience are invited to come up and cut sections out of Ms. Moorman's dress with a pair of scissors), and she and Paik took part in a variety of Fluxus-type events in and around Cologne. The tour was a great success from their point of view, ~~xxxx~~ "The Germans love Charlotte," Paik said ~~once.~~ recently. "They think she is what ~~xxx~~ American girl ought to be."

They returned to New York in time for Ms. Moorman to put together the ~~third~~ 1965 annual avant-garde festival, which was also the last to be held in Judson Hall. The management there became upset over Allan Kaprow's "Push-Pull" event, which enjoined the audience to go out and search in trash bins and vacant lots for discarded objects with which to furnish two empty rooms on stage; once again the police appeared, largely out of curiosity to see what was going on, but the Judson Hall management did not ~~really~~ get into the spirit of the thing. Even Norman Seaman, who had put up ~~cheerfully~~ with quite a lot, came to the regretful conclusion that

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he could no longer sponsor the annual Festival of the Avant-Garde.

When he was not composing or performing, Paik invoked the muse of TV. He had brought over from Tokyo a number of large, second-hand color television sets, with which he experimented constantly in the studio he had settled into on Canal Street. Visitors to the studio, over whose entrance Dick Higgins had posted a sign reading "I am not very eloquent," had to crawl over and through a maze of exposed electrical wires, tubes, and discontinuous circuitry to find Paik, who usually had on a pair of rubber boots that were supposed to prevent his electrocution. He had also taken to wearing a woollen scarf around his middle, even in warm weather, to ward off the stomach pains that several doctors had been unable to diagnose. There was no furniture to speak of. Three old RCA sets, pushed together and covered with a mattress, served as his bed. Paik had found that he could get magnificent distortions of TV pictures by using magnets and degaussing coils (devices employed in the earliest TV sets to correct for natural magnetic distortion). (over) In 1966 he discovered the "dancing wave pattern," a graceful, wavelike, looping image produced in color on the TV screen by modulating three audio input signals. Paik's electrical engineering was not exactly elegant, but it seemed to work. Many of his connections were achieved with scotch tape. "For me," he once said, "scotch tape is a tao."

His television experiments did not pass unnoticed. Paik had exhibited his manipulated TVs at The New School in 1965 -- along with his "Sonata for Adults Only" and other works; one critic said the TVs reminded him of upset stomachs in the TV commercials, but others had been more impressed. Porter McCray, the TK of the John D. Rockefeller III Fund, was impressed enough to recommend Paik for a $5000 grant to further his television experiments. And Cage and Merce Cunningham, the choreographer,

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invited him to project his TV imagery as part of the set for ~~a dance work called~~ their "Variations V," which was performed that summer at Lincoln Center. In the fall, the Bonino Gallery on fifty-seventh street gave Paik a one-man show, largely on the recommendation of his Cologne friend Mary Bauermeister who was living then in New York. The room-full of doctored TVs drew exceptionally large crowds for three weeks; it also drew a relatively kindly review by the New York Times art critic, John Canaday (((quote TK))). A month before the Bonino show, moreover, Paik had personally ushered in the new era of alternative, or underground TV. As early as 1961, in Cologne, Paik had spent a good deal of time abd money trying without success to construct a portable, lightweight television camera and videotape recorder. "I was very naive," Paik recalls. "I thought the first man to own videotape recorder could become best painter of the age." In Tokyo two years later, he had learned that Sony was developing just the sort of equipment he had had in mind. He kept himself posted on all the latest industry advances, and the day Sony's first Portapak video camera-recorder reached the Liberty Music Shop in New York, Paik bought it, using the unspent portion of the grant from the JDR III Fund. Moments later, he was busily videotaping Pope John's arrival at St. Patrick's Cathedral, and a number of other scenes around town, which he showed that same evening to the Monday night gathering of vanguard artists and film-makers at the Cafe à Go-Go in Greenwich Village.

Paik was feeling a lot better about New York. The exclusiveness of the artists, which had bothered him so much at first, he now saw as a necessary defense against the constant "information overload" to which everyone was subjected. "I began to understand New York from the New York point of view, and I felt more at home. It's funny -- coming to Istanbul once from Germany, I say to myself, 'Ah, is beginning of Asia.' And then when

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"Every night ten million people were watching the same Johnny Carson," he recalls, "and only I was watching a different one." He experimented with video feedback, when the camera picks up its own image on the receiver and goes slightly crazy, reproducing an infinity of mirror-images that become unrecognizable.

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I go back to Tokyo in 1963, I say, 'Is beginning of America.' That kind of chaotic energy, you know?" Paik's own energy was unflagging. He toured Europe again with Charlotte Moorman in 1966 -- they performed a gondola version of the Saint-Saens piece in Venice, with Ms. Moorman descending into the Grand Canal and subsequently being rushed to the hospital for a typhus shot that they had somehow overlooked. Paik helped out faithfully in all aspects of the avant-garde festivals that Ms. Moorman put on in Central Park, on Wards Island, on a Staten Island ferry boat, at the Seventh Regiment Armory, and elsewhere; he also figured prominently in two important group shows of kinetic and light art at the Howard Wise Gallery, in 1967. If not yet wholly ego-less, he was always willing to assist others and to participate in group efforts.

The only time anyone saw Paik seriously depressed was in February, 1967, when the police stopped the performance of his new "Opera Sextronique." Paik had been a little nervous about doing this piece in New York. He and Charlotte Moorman had performed it without incident in Aachen the preceding July, and again at the Philadelphia College of Art in January, but New York then was in the grip of one of its rare public morality seizures, and the police were abnormally alert to vice. "Opera Sextronique" has four acts, or "arias." In the first, Ms. Moorman, wearing a bikini outlined in small electric light bulbs, plays the 'cello on a darkened stage; in the second, she wears a topless evening gown, plays the 'cello, and puts on and takes off a succession of grotesque masks; the third aria has her nude from the waist down and clothed in a football uniform and helmet above, while in the fourth she is totally nude, playing her 'cello while seated behind a large, upright aerial bomb. The New York performance, at the Film-Makers' Cinematheque on West forty-second street, was interrupted by a police squadron midway through the second (topless) aria, and Ms. Moorman and Paik were carted

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off to jail. Ms. Moorman retains a vivid memory of Paik, sitting for his police photograph with a number hung around his neck, saying mournfully, "Oh, Charlotte, I never think it come to this." Later that night, in jail, Paik remembers feeling very calm -- "Like the last scene in Stendhal's 'Rouge et Noir,' when Julien Sorel is so much at peace. I thought that when I got kicked out of United States I would be hero in Germany. I was happy things were ending here -- all this complicated life. Well, we were released on bail next day, and a guy called from San Francisco offering us five thousand dollars to do our 'act' in a night club! We had many offers like that." They accepted none of them, however, and Paik was hard put to raise money for their defense. His lawyer was Ernest Rosenberger, who had defended Lenny Bruce and other prominent performers in obscenity trials. Rosenberger had no difficulty persuading the court that under no law could a musical composer be arrested for obscenity, but Ms. Moorman was less fortunate. Although the flower of New York's avant-garde came to testify on her behalf, and in spite of the fact that nudity was rapidly becoming the obligatory scene in the New York theater, she was convicted on the obscenity charge and given a three-year suspended sentence.

The conviction, according to Ms. Moorman, gave her grandmother in Little Rock a heart attack, and ~~xixx~~ ended her own career with the American Symphony and as a musician for TV commercials, which had been until then her main means of support. Lucrative offers to repeat the "act" in Las Vegas and elsewhere only made her feel worse about it all. Paik, too, was at a low ebb. The small amounts of money that he had been receiving from his family in Tokyo had dried up -- the family, he says, "had just lost another fortune." He owed a rather large bill to Consolidated Edison, which he couldn't pay, and he was having visa problems. It was with some

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relief, then, that he accepted a post as artist-in-residence at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, Long Island. Allan Kaprow, who was trying to establish a sort of avant-garde institute at Stony Brook with funds from the Rockefeller Foundation, had been instrumental in getting the director of the Foundation's arts program, Howard Klein, to visit Paik's studio, and Klein had subsequently arranged for Paik's one-year appointment to Stony Brook. Nobody bothered him there, so he spent his time on video experiments and on writing a long report on the uses of television in the "instant global university" of the future. One of his recommendations was that television (stop) being so exclusively nationalistic. "You simply cannot escape Camus in a book store," he wrote, "yet do you remember seeing a production of French TV lately?" Paik has followed his own advice -- his recent "Global Groove" contains excerpts from French, German, Japanese, Austrian, and African TV productions -- and he feels strongly that if we were to see more examples of Asian TV we might be less inclined to misunderstand the Asian mentality as disastrously as we have done in the past (Vietnam being a case in point). Paik's report went unnoticed at Stony Brook, but it has been reprinted many times since then and is looked upon within the alternative video movement as a prophetic document.

The Rockefeller Foundation (which has no connection with the JDR III Fund) has shown a surprising sympathy for experimental TV. While its grants to public television have been small compared to the Ford Foundation's lavish outpourings in that area, Rockefeller Foundation money supports the experimental workshops at San Francisco's KQED, Boston's WGBH, and New York's WNET, all three of which cater primarily to artists working in video. From the artists' point of view the best of these workshops has been WGBH, largely because of a young producer-director there named Fred Barzyk. As Barzyk saw it, television had begun to develop its own unique properties in one field only -- the spot commercial message, which compresses huge quantities of information into a few seconds; in its

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regular programming, TV was still imitating the motion picture. Barzyk was able to persuade the management at WGBH to let him play around with his own and other people's ideas for opening things up a bit, and one of the early results was "What's Happening, Mr. Silver?", a youth-oriented, technically innovative weekly program whose unpredictable host, the British-born David Silver, once conducted an on-camera interview with a young woman while they both reclined, casually nude, on a large bed. The fast cuts and visual juxtapositions on "What's Happening, Mr. Silver?" reminded some viewers of vintage Ernie Kovacs, who is now considered a sort of pioneer in the effort to shake video loose from its moorings in cinema. Barzyk wanted to go a lot further along these lines, and when the recently established Public Broadcasting Laboratory (set up by the Ford Foundation to improve the level of non-commercial television programming) asked him in 1968 to work with a selected group of artists (each of whom would be invited to come and make videotapes in the WGBH studio, he readily agreed. This project led in 1969 to a one-hour program called "The Medium Is the Medium," the first showing of video art on the home screen, with contributions by Aldo Tambellini, Thomas Tadlock, Allan Kaprow, James Seawright, Otto Piene, and Nam June Paik. Paik's seven-minute segment, the concluding one on the program, was called "First Electronic Opera." While an off-screen pianist played Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata," and an off-screen Paik periodically advised viewers to close one eye or both eyes ("This is audience participation TV"), the screen showed double and triple images of a nude Go-Go girl, President Nixon's face stretching putty-like as he talked about "the brilliant manager of my campaign for the presidency," three hirsute hippies mugging for the camera, and the dancing wave pattern looping and rolling and changing color. At the end, Paik's laconic voice was again heard telling the viewers, "Please follow instructions. Turn off your television set."

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The people at WGBH were a little surprised by the ~~nude dancer~~ Go-Go dancer, but everyone there was delighted with Paik. Barzyk, of course, was naturally sympathetic to Paik's ideas about "low fidelity TV" -- instead of trying always to reproduce images as accurately as possible, Paik said, one could also work to produce original TV images that nobody had ever seen before. Barzyk and Michael Rice, the station's vice-president and program manager, were eager to have Paik come back and work at the studio, and so, when Paik came to them soon afterward and said he needed $10,000 to build a video synthesizer, Barzyk and his associates went to the Rockefeller Foundation and got it for him. Nobody, not even Barzyk, understood too clearly what it was that Paik had in mind, building. Paik wanted to make a machine that would let him create TV images directly -- without his having to involve hordes of technicians and batteries of costly equipment. He had drawn up a rough proposal that folded out to about fifteen feet in length, but it made little sense to the WGBH engineers. "Nobody could really tell whether the thing would work or not," Barzyk recalls, "partly because nobody really understood Paik's English very well then. But Nam June breeds a certain kind of energy and strength. You just can't deny Nam June."

Paik spent the next year at the WGBH studios in Cambridge, working with his Japanese collaborator, Shuya Abe, whom the JDR III Fund had brought over from Tokyo for the project. Paik gives Abe full credit for the engineering and design of the Paik-Abe Videosynthesizer: "Without him I could never have done it." It was, and is, a somewhat ramshackle mechanism ("Is sloppy machine, like me," Paik explains), which is continually being added to and improved by Paik and others. (Paik and Abe have made four other models, one of which is at WNET's Studio 46 in New York). What it does is to take the images relayed by a number of black-

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and-white video cameras or sound-signal generators, and convert them then into an infinite number of colored patterns and configurations. It is manually operated, by means of a console with levers, knobs, and dials to control the various inputs and the changes that take place in the resulting images. The operator "plays" it like a piano, and with practice he can often produce the particular images and configurations he wants; but it is also possible to let the machine generate images randomly, and Paik, who prefers process to results and who likes to be surprised, is more inclined to let it take that course. The video-synthesizer can be used by itself to create live programming or video-tapes, and it can also be used to transmogrify pre-recorded material in ways that are measureless to man. It does just about what Paik wanted it to do, which is to undermine completely the complex economics of ~~broadcast~~ television.

Actually Paik's and Abe's is not the only videosynthesizer around or even ~~the~~ necessarily the first -- Stephen Beck, in California, and Eric Siegel, in New York, each made similar devices at about the same time -- but the Paik-Abe model was the first to be used for broadcast television. In the spring of 1970, Paik used it to produce a four-hour show for WGBH, live, called "Video Commune," whose soundtrack was the entire recorded oeuvre of The Beatles, and whose imagery was provided by Paik, Barzyk, their studio associates, and a large number of perfect strangers whom Paik invited in off the street to play with the controls or to have their features melted or stretched on camera. The program was broadcast over the UHF channel, rather than the stronger VHF band, and at one point the visual pyrotechnics succeeded in blowing out a transmitter. Viewer response was so favorable that WGBH repeated the entire program twice more that summer.

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The video art movement was visibly gathering steam by 1970. Dozens of artists had started to work in the medium, several universities had established video departments, and art galleries and museums were duly taking notice. Howard Wise, whose interest was shifting from kinetic and light art to art-by-video, had put on an extremely influential group show in the spring of 1969 called "Television As a Creative Medium," with works by twelve different artists. Paik's main contribution to this show was "TV Bra for Living Sculpture," a contraption whose two three-inch television sets, worn in lieu of upper clothing by the ~~loyal~~ dauntless Ms. Moorman, were wired to Ms. Moorman's 'cello so that her playing generated images on the tiny screens. Paik announced that this was an attempt on his part to "humanize electronics." Ms. Moorman, who believes it is Paik's greatest work, said recently that when she performs in the TV Bra it is "a great, great feeling -- so pure and romantic." The following year, Paik and Moorman demonstrated the TV Bra and Paik exhibited other works old and new at the "Vision and Television" exhibition at the Rose Art Gallery of Brandeis University, an exhibition that was heavily attended by students and by dogs. "Television operates on a very high sound cycle," Paik explained afterward, "and that cycle is very attractive to dogs. We had hundreds of TV sets in the museum, and every morning many, many dogs would come." On the last day of the Brandeis show, a representative of the New York State Council on the Arts came in and asked Russell Connor, the museum's assistant director and the man responsible for the exhibition, to become the State Council's expert on grants to television artists. Connor accepted the offer. Paik sensed that this was an important turning point in the development of video art. He happened to be spending that year at California Institute of Arts, teaching video techniques in a program run by his old friend Allan Kaprow (who had given up the East Coast for the West), somewhat to Kaprow's distress,

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Paik decided to leave Cal Arts at the end of the spring semester and return to New York. "I say to Allan,'Look, every artist has once in their life, their time. You had your time with Happenings. Next year is video time -- I have to be in New York.'"

As it turned out Paik divided his time that year between New York and Boston. Soon after his four-hour "Video Commune" show at WGBH, he and six other artists were commissioned by the Boston Symphony to provide visual accompaniment for a TV program of symphonic highlights. Once again Paik's sequence came last on the program, and offered a fairly vivid contrast to the lyrical, abstract imagery of the other artists. He chose to work with the Boston Symphony's recording to Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 4 in G Major, and his visual imagery for it included quick cuts of a bust of Beethoven being punched by a man's fist, and of a piano (a toy piano shown in closeup so it filled the screen) catching fire and burning to a crisp. The Boston Symphony was said to be far from pleased.

Paik spent a large part of 1971 working at WGBH on an ambitious, hour-long videotape called "A Tribute to John Cage," on the occasion of the composer's sixtieth birthday. But early in 1972, when WNET reorganized its experimental workshop as The Television Laboratory and invited video artists to come in on a regular basis, Paik was among the first to be invited. He had a lot to do with the way the Laboratory was set up under its new director, David Loxton, and he contributed a steady flow of ideas and suggestions, and his "The Selling of New York" was the first TV-Lab project to be broadcast over WNET-Channel 13. Paik had started this opus with the notion that he wanted to show some of the good things about New York, of which he had become so fond by now that he no longer thought of leaving -- but it did not quite

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work out that way. The program opens with a shot of Charlotte Moorman in the TV Bra, and then keeps cutting rapidly back and forth between Japanese television commercials and views of a television set on which a commentator (Russell Connor) is citing facts about New York. The television-within-a-television turns up near a bathtub in which a girl is taking a bath; on the night table beside a bed in which a couple is simultaneously trying to make love and to turn it off; in a deserted living room where, while Connor is announcing that "New York's police force is now larger than the army of Denmark," a burglar comes on, yanks out the cord, and steals the set. When the program was shown over Channel 13 in 1973, several viewers called to ask why their sets were suddenly bringing in Japanese TV; others just wanted to know what the hell was going on.

His admirers at WGBH and WNET look on Paik as an absurdly comic and wholly engaging personality, an inventive genius, and an amazingly successful promoter of his own ideas. "Nam June is the world's best hustler," David Loxton said not long ago. "A lot of the time I feel he knows a lot more clearly what he wants to say than he lets on -- it's as though he's decided not to let the bureaucracy understand him too clearly or they'll step in and louse things up." What his friends at the studios may not fully grasp as yet is Paik's continuing commitment to the anti-system, anti-formal energies of his Fluxus period. His videotapes, up to an including the recently televised "Global Groove" and the not-yet-shown "Suite 212," a series of five-to-eight-minute vignettes of different aspects of New York City, which will be seen over WNET at the close of its nightly programming starting in January, have been characterized by an ironic wit that is fairly glacial at times, and by all sorts of subversive assaults on familiar patterns of TV viewing.

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It is the same sort of comedy that pervades his "action music" and his performances with Charlotte Moorman. Ms. Moorman has admitted that ~~sometimes~~ she feels a little depersonalized when performing Paik's compositions. "Sometimes I feel Paik doesn't really think of me as Charlotte Moorman," she reflectdd last spring. "He looks on me as a work of his." This doesn't upset her, because she has absolute faith in Paik's artistic talent. She is extremely proud of the fact that Paik's "TV 'Cello," a vaguely 'cello-like construction of three television sets with a ~~s~~tring down the middle, on which she uses a regulation bow to produce, not 'cello sounds, but "TV 'Cello sounds," is the "first real innovation in 'cello design ~~in xxx~~ six hundred years." She is equally proud that when she underwent surgery two years ago and could not perform in her regular fashion for several weeks, Paik constructed a "TV Bed" out of a dozen television sets fastened together, on which she was able to play her 'cello while lying down. The concentrated and totally unsmiling dedication that Ms. Moorman brings to her performances with TV Bras, TV 'Cellos, and TV ~~Bds~~Beds -- the fact that she obviously does not see anything funny in what she is doing -- contributes quite a bit to the overall effect.

So far, Paik is the only video artist who has managed to bridge the gap between the gallery-sponsored, limited distribution, "fine art" videotapes and the broadcast-oriented work of the television workshops. He has continued to show his doctored TVs and his videotapes at the Bonino Gallery. While the gallery has yet to sell a Paik TV set, one was stolen from his last show there in the s ring of 1974, and his "TV Buddha," an authentic and rather fine TK century Japanese Buddha figure that sits contemplating its own image in a ~~facing~~ closed circuit TV set, could easily find a buyer if Paik were willing to sell it, which he isn't. Paik's

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delicate, calligraphic ink drawings, which look like TV sets when the picture has been lost due to technical difficulties, are being snapped up by European and American dealers, however; his videotapes are in great demand around the country, and a retrospective exhibition of his work -- the hallmark of an artist having arrived -- was presented at the Everson Museum in Syracuse in 1973.

The "fine art" video people tend to feel that Paik, for all his importance as a pioneer, is not really a very serious artist. A great deal of the video art to be seen now in the galleries is almost unbelievably boring -- endless repetitions of simple actions such as a hand trying to grab a falling object, or the artist lying on the floor of his studio and talking to himself. Paik's videotapes, by contrast, are often dismissed (or appreciated) as mere entertainment. Paik understands this, and is not bothered. "I have a theory about American avant-garde art," he said last spring. "Serious avant-garde art here is always in opposition to American mass culture. In a way, mass culture conditions serious art. For instance, why is it that only in America suhh intensely boring music has been produced? And films? Because Hollywood is doing too good a job, I think. Popular culture is setting the rules, so you have to define what you do against what they are doing. We want to make more crude if they are perfect, we want to make more boring if they are exciting, you know?

"Of course Oriental music is boring,too. But Oriental boring music is wet, moist -- very spiritual; American is very dry, like baseball. American boring music is not at all spiritual. La Monte Young tries his best to imitate Oriental esthetic, but the more he tries to be Oriental

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the more he becomes American. Another thing -- Oriental music was always for the aristocrat, was always rich man's thing. Now America has reached stage where most people are aristocrats. Much richer than Europeans, anyway. Americans need not be entertained every second because they are so rich. They think art can be kind of extension of parties. My first concert at New School here was really crowded like hell. I couldn't do anything. People were just talking together, there was no still moment. I thought it was big mistake, big failure, but afterward people say it was very big success because so many people there, including notables. America has in a way this very rich attitude that makes boring, long music possible. But I'm not writing boring music that much, the reason is that I come from very poor country and I am poor. I have to entertain people every second."

Paik himself feels that video art still has a long way to go before its potential emerges. What is going on today is a widespread exploration of the medium by various groups -- visual artists, film-makers, dancers, musicians -- each of whom approaches it from a different point of view and often with quite different expectations and goals. Each group tends to feel, of course, that its approach is the only valid one. This situation reminds Paik of the ancient Chinese story about the monkey who thought he was dancing on the top of the world, only to find that he was dancing on the Buddha's palm. "Everyone is trying to define what video is," Paik has observed. "Art critics struggle with that a lot. But I think best thing is not to try to define video. In New York every art movement is destined to die in five years, but I would like to save video from such quick obsolescence. It is more than fad."

In the future, Paik is convinced, all art will have as its prime function the movement of information. In his view the artist must become

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a "humanizing agent" within the vast, proliferating network of information technology, and he still thinks that the best way for this to happen is for the artist to give up his self-serving ego, to become more like the anonymous cathedral builders of the middle ages. Although his theories on the future of art and of video technology are sometimes dismissed as so much visionary claptrap, Paik's theorizing is based on solid intellectual groundwork. A voracious reader of technical data, he is also well-informed about contemporary thinking in many different fields, and his studio apartment in Westbeth, the artists' cooperative, is adrift in scientific papers, television industry studies and reports, clippings from American, European, and Japanese newspapers and magazines, and books of all kinds -- not to mention TV sets in various stages of decomposition or reconstitution. When he wants to cite a fact or a statistic he can go instantly to the proper stack of papers and dig it out (often causing the stack to subside laterally across the floor), ~~and leading his listener to wonder how anything in it can ever be found again~~. Paik says that by 1980 the picture telephone will be in use throughout the world, in color, and that, by making most travel for business reasons unnecessary, this will contribute substantially to solving the energy crisis. (He has proposed topless answering services for understimulated executives). The videotape cassette, which is already here, will make possible Paik's "global university" -- a place where vast quantities of up-to-date information on every conceivable subject can be stored, with computers to provide instant retrieval, so that students of all ages can pursue their own education at their own pace.

Even more far-reaching effects on society, Paik believes, will result from the development of cable television. "It will definitely come," he said recently. "Rand Corporation thinks cable is very good

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for long-range investment. Nobody really making money in cable now, but cable lobby in Washington is very strong , they buy up Congressmen like nothing." In his recent report to the Rockefeller Foundation, which has retained Paik as a consultant on communications, he pointed out that in the late forties, when the Federal Communications Commission was offering relatively inexpensive licenses for television stations in the strong VHF band, the intellectual and academic communities took little or no interest; consequently, nearly all the licenses went to commercial interests. With the advent of cable TV, he went on to say, approximately eighty new channels become available for licensing in the UHF band, and because of the superiority of cable transmission the signal on each of these is as strong or stronger than the signal on VHF. Will the intellectuals continue to ignore this powerful resource? Paik would like to see at least one new cable channel in each community set aside for work by video artists. Others could be reserved for municipal or community affairs, for children's programming, for theater or music or dance. There could even be all-Mozart stations, as Paik once suggested, or all-Beethoven, or all-Cage. Think of it! But unless somebody acted rather quickly, he warned, history would repeat itself and the licenses would go once again to the commercial interests, the polluters of the videosphere. "I wish all our consultants could be as productive as he is," Howard Klein said not long ago. "With all his whimsicality, Paik can go straight to the essentials on complicated matters, with great logic and force."

Paik, of course, has had his problems in dealing with the establishment. "Only reason I survived this long at WNET is because I had underground outlet," he conceded last spring. "I have a lot of frustration to work within system. A lot of frustration. So, when I get mad at

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them, I don't fight -- I yield to them, and then go and do some stupid thing in small place that satisfies me so that I can work with them again. Underground outlet is my safety valve. I like being world's most famous bad pianist. But I also like to do NET because it is important, is where I can maybe influence society.

"We are now at stage of ancient Egypt with hieroglyphics," Paik went on, after a moment's reflection. "TV equipment is so expensive that only the priests can use it. And there is constant effort made by networks and by TV unions to keep production costs high. That is classical way of monopoly capital, you know? I want to find ways to cut cost so it can be opened up to others, many others. Now we have color Portapak -- costs three thousand dollar in Tokyo, six thousand here, but will come down. And with use of computers, cost of editing videotape will become much cheaper. Problem is not really socialism or capitalism, but technology, you know? -- how we manage that. For instance, technological forecasting, future research, I am very interested in that. They need us artists, to make that sort of information available to public. Even New York Times will not print Rand Corporation Report because it is so boring. Like McLuhan say, we are antenna for changing society. But not only antenna -- we also have output capacity, capacity to humanize technology. My job is to see how establishment is working, and to look for little holes where I can get my fingers in and tear away walls. And also, try not to get too corrupt."

- Calvin Tomkins

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August 2, 1974

Expenses - Nam June Paik Profile

June 7 - round trip to Boston (WGBH), 414 miles at .10 per mile	.....	41.40
July 24- Dinner w/Paik, Moorman	.....	45.60
		$ 87 .00

Calvin Tomkins