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CATALOG

FAIR  
AND  
WIDE

BY LANFRANCO ACETI AND OMAR KHOLEIF

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Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development



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LEONARDO ELECTRONIC ALMANAC CATALOG, VOLUME 19 ISSUE 5

# Far and Wide

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**LANFRANCO ACETI AND OMAR KHOLEIF**

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**ÖZDEN ŞAHİN AND CATHERINE M. WEIR**

The Leonardo Electronic Almanac  
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Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development

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

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

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# THE GLOBAL PLAY OF NAM JUNE PAIK

## THE ARTIST THAT EMBRACED AND TRANSFORMED MARSHALL MCLUHAN'S DREAMS INTO REALITY

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

Nam June Paik and Marshall McLuhan are two of the numerous artists and authors who inspired my formative years. If one cannot deny Paik's love of play and satire imbued in popular culture and used to disguise a real intellectual and conceptual approach to the artwork, neither can easily be discounted McLuhan's strong advocacy of the powerful tool that technology can be, so powerful that is able to obscure and sideline the message itself in the name of the medium.

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

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

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

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

ness to challenge the various media he used, the audience that followed him and the established aesthetic of his own artistic practice. Taking risks, particularly taking risks with one's own artistic practice, may also mean to risk a downward spiral; and Paik did not seem to shy away from artworks' challenging productions and made use of varied and combined media, therefore re-defining the field of art and placing himself at the center of it.

*In the following decades, Paik was to transform virtually all aspects of video through his innovative sculptures, installations, single-channel videotapes, productions for television, and performances. As a teacher, writer, lecturer, and advisor to foundations, he continually informed and transformed 20th century contemporary art.*<sup>2</sup>

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

*Paik's latest creative deployment of new media is through laser technology. He has called his most recent installation a "post-video project," which continues the articulation of the kinetic image through the use of laser energy projected onto scrim, cascading water, and smoke-filled sculptures. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Paik's work shows us that the cinema and video are fusing with electronic and digital media into new image technologies and forms of expression. The end of video*

*and television as we know them signals a transformation of our visual culture.*<sup>3</sup>

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

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

My fascination with the *Laser Cone's re-fabrication*<sup>4</sup> in Liverpool was immediate and I wanted to reflect in the publication, albeit symbolically, the multiple possibilities and connections that underpinned the Laser Cone's re-fabrication and its medium, as well as Paik's and McLuhan's visions of the world to come, made of light, optics and lasers.

*The word laser is actually an acronym; it stands for Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation. Nam June Paik undertook a residency with Bell labs, who were the inventors of the laser. It was here that he created his 1966 piece Digital Experiment at Bell Labs, exploring the stark contrast between digital and analogue and his fascination with technology in its material form. His work with Bell set the precedent for artists and musicians to start using technology creatively in a new way.*<sup>5</sup>

This catalog became a tool to mirror and perhaps 'transmediate' the laser installation "made of a huge green laser that [...] conjoin[ed] FACT with Tate Liverpool. Travelling 800 metres as the crow flies, the beam of light [...] made] a symbolic connection between the two galleries during their joint exhibition of video artist, pioneer and composer Nam June Paik. Artist Peter Appleton, who was behind the laser which joined the Anglican and Metropolitan cathedrals in Liverpool during 2008 Capital of Culture, [was] commissioned by FACT to create the artwork, *Laser Link*, which references Nam June Paik's innovative laser works."<sup>6</sup>

The catalog is in itself a work that reflects the laser connections, the speed of contacts, the possibilities of connecting a variety of media as easily as connecting people from all parts of the world. In this phantasmagoria of connections it almost seems possible to visualize

the optic cables and WiFi that like threads join the people and the media of McLuhan's "global village" and the multiplicities of media that Paik invited us to use to create what I would like to define as the contemporary "bastard art."<sup>7</sup>

#### Lanfranco Aceti

Editor in Chief, *Leonardo Electronic Almanac*  
Director, Kasa Gallery



#### A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR IN CHIEF

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

#### ENDNOTES AND REFERENCES

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3. Nam June Paik/Nam June Paik Studios' official Web site, "John Hanhardt's essay," <http://www.paikstudios.com/essay.html> (accessed January 10, 2013).
4. *Laser Cone*, 2001/2010, Nam June Paik in collaboration with Norman Ballard, installation view at FACT. Photographer: Stephen King.
5. FACT, "Laser Cone," FACT, <http://www.fact.co.uk/projects/nam-june-paik/laser-cone/> (accessed January 10, 2013).
6. FACT, "Laser Link," FACT, <http://www.fact.co.uk/projects/nam-june-paik/laser-link/> (accessed January 20, 2013).
7. Art as a bastard is interpreted, in this passage, as something of uncertain origins that cannot be easily defined and neatly encapsulated in a definition or framework. "Art is often a bastard, the parents of which we do not know." Nam June Paik as cited in Florence de Meredieu, *Digital and Video Art*, trans. Richard Elliott (Edinburgh: Chambers, 2005), 180.

# The Future Is Now?

**Far and Wide: Nam June Paik is an edited collection that seeks to explore the legacy of the artist Nam June Paik in contemporary media culture.** This particular project grew out of a collaboration between FACT, Foundation for Art and Creative Technology, and the Tate Liverpool, who in late 2010-2011 staged the largest retrospective the artist's work in the UK. The first since his death, it also showcased the premiere of Paik's laser work in Europe. The project, staged across both sites, also included a rich public programme. Of these, two think tank events, *The Future is Now: Media Arts, Performance and Identity after Nam June Paik* and *The Electronic Superhighway: Art after Nam June Paik*, brought together a forum of leading artists, performers and thinkers in the cross-cultural field together to explore and dissect the significance of Paik within broader culture.

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

lective, enabled by the cross-embedded nature of the current technological field. ¶

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

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

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

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

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

far and wide Nam June Paik's influence may have travelled, and to consider what influence it has yet to wield.

**Omar Kholeif**

*Editor and Curator*

*FACT, Foundation for Art and Creative Technology*

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



# NICE

# PARIS

# PRAGUE



# REYKJAVIK

# RIO DE JANEIRO

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

# JOHN G. HANHARDT

*Q&A session chaired by*  
**Sarah Cook**

This text is a transcription of a Q&A session from:

Nam June Paik Conference

The Future Is Now: Media Arts, Performance and Identity after Nam June Paik

presented by FACT and Tate Liverpool

Friday 18 February 2011

**SARAH COOK:** Thank you for your anecdotes about your experience of working on exhibitions with Nam June Paik. I think you also framed all the different kinds of exhibitions very well. I will just kick off this Q&A while you all formulate your questions (we have people with microphones ready to come and take your questions in a few moments.) I was wondering about whether or not we might call Nam June Paik a hacker as well as an activist? I think there is something about hacking and the way artists work today where they are very much led by the technology; sometimes they get a new piece of equipment and think, “What can I do with this?” I was talking to a colleague and he was curious about this question as to whether Nam June Paik was led by technology or if he was led by bigger ideas and then found the appropriate technology to investigate them? It is a bit of a difficult one to pinpoint.

JOHN G. HANHARDT: That is a very interesting question. One of the things that really distinguished Nam June Paik and other artists of his generation as individuals was that new technology wasn't leading what they were doing, but was enabling them. Jumping ahead, remember in the 1980s when the big industries started producing image-processing programs that meant you could manipulate images in a variety of ways? We were looking at this work and looking for the artist who was not just fulfilling what the program could do, but was bringing to the program an imagination, an image, an idea that the technology was allowing them to pursue. Because Nam June was working so early with video, with television, and rethinking how you look at the television set, distorting and remaking its

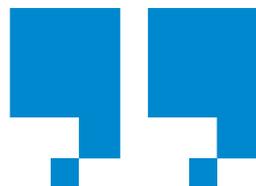
insides, he was anticipating the portable video camera that was developed by Sony and introduced to the market in 1964–1965. He immediately seized upon it, as did a lot of artists, but he knew immediately how this could be brought into his exhibition at the Gallery Bonino in 1968 and at the Howard Wise Gallery. Shuya Abe, with whom I talked a lot about this, never imagined the image processor, but he brought to Nam June Paik levels of expertise in working with electronics, and Nam June understood the electronics enough to say what he was looking for. Shuya Abe enabled a number of projects and pieces and helped to make the robot fully remote-controlled. Nam June Paik was very impressed with the ability to make that project remote controlled. Another example of what I'm talking about can be seen in *Megatron/Matrix* (1995), where there was a computer program with which Nam June Paik imagined infinite possibilities. I think that the creative process is both seeing what technology can do, but also knowing that it can realize something and not just remake something.

**SARAH COOK:** I think it is really significant, in relation to what you were saying about Paik being someone who wanted to interrupt the flow of broadcast, to think about artists today and how they seek to interrupt the flow of media. This is very important because technological innovation today is unrelenting in its flow, and it is interesting to see how artists interrupt that flow. Sometimes the process has to be more than just to break down the latest machine that has come onto the market.

JOHN G. HANHARDT: He would love to be in this mix, engaging with the Internet and seeing the fulfillment of these practices. If you go back and look at the early 1970s and at how artists like Barry Crow and Mary Lucier would mask the TV monitor, building it into the wall so that the screen was flush with the surface: this was trying to make the television into a flat screen without the box. Of course we all know that is now not only possible but widely available. We see now what Nam June was talking about in 1973, about video being in most homes. That is why I was talking today about how these histories have to be brought into museums, that they must be seen as rich and complex alongside the other arts in terms of what they contributed to it and not just categorized and separated. That's the excitement of a space like FACT, where you have new work being produced, where you have earlier work being shown and you have multiple screening and work spaces. Perhaps this is the museum and not the place over the way. In any case, this is the place where things are happening and I know that this would be where Nam June would want to be. Someone was talking about him as being an artist but he saw himself more as an individual and a creative person. He was thrilled by the fact that people were responding to him, and he enjoyed what the art world brought him, but at the same time he was constantly investing his work in new capacities and new projects.



*Nam June Paik knew that he wanted to capture you, and the rhythm of the music, the popularity of the music, the anticipated hearing of the music in the piece was on one level a way to move things forward.*



**SARAH COOK:** We should take some questions from the audience.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** I am quite interested in Nam June Paik's relationship with music, specifically with rhythm in images and the notion of speed. Quite a lot of his stuff is really fast and unrelenting, moving in a constant stream. Could you elaborate a bit on that?

JOHN G. HANHARDT: Yes, that is very interesting. We know about his relationship to new music, to his performative work with smashing violins, working with audio tape, remixing and scratching records in live performances during the 1960s. There was also his relationship with Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels, bringing his pop song into *Global Groove*, and an interest in the popular music of the time. I think it was tied in, in some measure; to the fact he didn't want to bore his audience. He knew that he wanted to capture you, and the rhythm of the music, the popularity of the music, the anticipated hearing of the music in the piece was on one level a way to move things forward. He liked to bring music and sound into his environment; *TV Garden* is filled with *Global Groove* and part of *Global Groove* was to switch between different kinds of television stations

around the world. Not only that but the different auditory experiences of different kinds of music: Korean, Native American, Mitch Ryder, and this and that. That was part of the idea, that change, to bring you into the work, and that's why I think humor and play was a very important part of his work. He wanted to bring you in and then suddenly say "a-ha." *TV Chair* is a version of it with a closed-circuit camera: I cannot see my image looking down on it but if I sit on the chair I then can't see my image because I'm sitting on the monitor, which is in the base of the chair. Suddenly your point of view and your relationship to the TV set shifts. We see this again in *Zenith TV*, which is a brilliant work in the exhibition, where the cathode ray tube is taken out and a closed-circuit camera is placed inside the set. When you look into the monitor, you are looking into the eye piece and pointing out of the window, because television is framing a small part of the larger world. We often talk about television as a window onto the world, but it is a window on to the world of corporate television; which I think is another point he was making with the work. So there's humor, which brings you into subversive play, which then brings you into an understanding of the media in a larger way.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** I was thinking more about the translation of rhythm into his visual work.

JOHN G. HANHARDT: One should consider the image and the speed with which he could work with the image processor. There was a chance relationship in his work, in the sense that it isn't syncopated in the strict way of a particular rhythm being echoed in the movement; it is more of a layering of music that plays over the dance. Except of course with Mitch Ryder, where there is both the syncopation and what I suppose one could call dis-syncopation, in different pieces depending on how he was working. However, when the music is in relationship to dance then he is definitely syncopating the two and animating it through his image processing. So there's the rhythm, the beat that goes forward and the dancer is moving in relationship to it but that image is being distorted, not only in the front image of the dancer but also in the field in which the dancer is playing. He's taken the dancers from the studio, mixing them into a virtual surface of video. So there are multiple dimensions of movement that are playing off the sound and its rhythm. Am I getting closer to answering your question or at least responding to it if I cannot answer it?

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** Well, yes, I am getting the sense that he has a very distinct feeling of rhythm in the flow of the image.

JOHN G. HANHARDT: There is a short analysis of *Global Groove* done by a German scholar, which is available in the catalogue that we did for his last show at the Deutsche Guggenheim in Berlin. It is a very good piece to look at, the way the video is edited is different, but it is a very interesting piece to look at in terms of the variety of flows that were happening within it.

**SARAH COOK:** I think we can pass the microphone to Susanne Rennert.

SUSANNE RENNERT: Just in addition to John's explanation, I think my understanding of the rhythm of the video image editing was really related to his audio experiments as well. I see the *Random Access* works, both the record piece and the magnetic tape piece on the wall, as very significant in terms of looking at his later video-image editing. I think it was definitely the deconstruction of linear composition that he really had in mind, because that also really came through in his video editing. There was a certain quality to the rhythm in relation to the music that he was using and to all the poetry reading he was using. I think the way he was approaching those things was quite musical and I feel that those early experiments, with *Random Access* especially, really indicated a new way of understanding the visual image. This understanding is perhaps also slightly different from one an artist from a visual background might have developed. That early musical understanding probably helped him to realize something quite distinctive from other practices of the time.

JOHN G. HANHARDT: I would just like to pick up on Sue's point that music is a temporal medium and is important in terms of its relationship to video and to time. On the other hand I do see *Random Access* and this interaction with sound as related to the interaction with the television. Two abstract scenarios are created through two different modalities of working with sound and a television set. I do think that he worked with sound as he advanced into video, that he pursued this enlarged range of musical reference as he widened his

view of television. The videotape and video essays that I just mentioned were also places where he used music extensively. *Living with the Living Theater* is a fantastic tape: you see people listening to information, how they hear it and how it is then processed into tapes. That work hasn't really been charted fully.

**SARAH COOK:** We've still got time for questions.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** Question for curators please: catalogs. Usually when you produce a catalog, you make a book to sell for around 20 pounds that features pictures of paintings or other visual work included in a show. With Paik that doesn't work: you need a video catalog. Is there chance that galleries could produce some of those? This is a big retrospective exhibition and I would love to have a video catalog of it. Could it be done?

JOHN G. HANHARDT: I cannot speak for the Tate, but conceptually I can say yes. I think there is, on one hand, value in a book documenting different textual material, representing an installation, but videotapes are highly under-represented. I remember when I did Paik's catalogue in 1982, we got access to the Polaroid lab to create high-quality still images from his videotapes, so we could show them in sequence in the back of the book. At the time, this was a breakthrough in representing this work, but now of course we can plant discs in books. I do think that the idea of books-on-demand, of being able to print out the book that you want, is of value. I do think that there are ways that we should be able to connect to the moving image and integrate it into catalogs. Essentially, what you are talking about could be done on a disc, so in answer to your question: Yes! Do it!

MIKE STUBBS: I'll chip in from FACT's perspective. This series of interviews and talks is being recorded and they will appear in a linear fashion on the FACT TV website. So we do have an IPTV channel at FACT: we can upload content to that which you can then search and watch at your leisure. Of course in the 1980s there was a sort of proliferation of experiments with DVDs being included in the back of catalogs. That was fantastic at the beginning, but it takes a lot of time to watch linear moving image material or to listen to podcasts because we are overly proliferated by moving image and audio content. So it really comes down to choice and to economy. Can I ask you how much would you pay for a video catalog?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: A paper catalog is 20 pounds, so I certainly would be willing to pay that.

MIKE STUBBS: Okay so perhaps you could leave your address afterwards and we can see what we can do. Likewise, if anyone else is interested they can do the same.

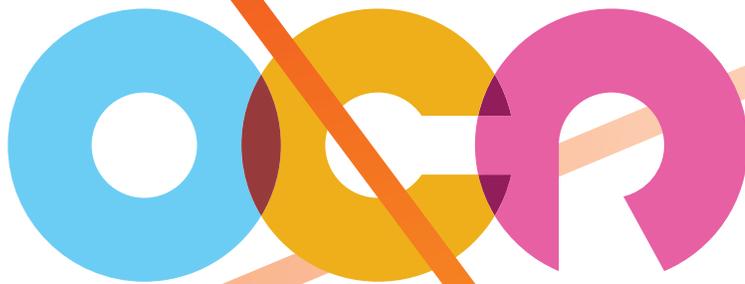
**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** It's a question about legacy. Nam June Paik's legacy as an artist is extremely well understood, well documented and in many ways quite clear, but I'm really interested in the TV experiments. My question is what kind of relationship do you think that those experiments have with mainstream broadcast media? He was working in these environments where his work was being disseminated to a lot of people at the same time. Do you think there is anything that has really carried on from those experiments into that stream rather than into what I would consider an art stream?

JOHN G. HANHARDT: There is, historically you can definitely see the techniques with the processor used in *Global Groove*, where the figure rotates and disappears, for example, moving into American advertising. It was reported back then that one of the most active renters of films from the Film Makers' Co-Operative in New York was Madison Avenue, so there was definitely a movement. Paik's work I know you can trace back to some adverts that happened on television; that were incorporated into television. Also, I remember when MTV first came on and the notion of the music video was something very new, the idea of MTV was essentially 24 hours of visual radio. Of course, this is before it became reality television thanks to the influence of British reality TV, but I'm not going to elaborate on that! So the 24 hours of television, of music, you definitely see that coming from Paik and a lot of artists who were actively working with video and the migration of that into the music video industry. Many of them worked in both, so I think there are a number of connections. Also, as artists worked to get their work onto television, it led to some influence in terms of documentaries. If you look at reality TV and its notions of real time, that is also located in the history of film. If you look at the famous *Seven Day* series on a particular family in the States, that became a television program in the 1970s, you will discover that there are these models one can see advancing.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** I actually was quite struck by the discussion at the beginning about links to contemporary practice and technology. But Paik strikes me as someone distinctly analog in a lot of ways. I would be really interested, John, just to hear your thoughts on what, in terms of his practice, is about an analog moment? In some ways, I think, that links to our discussion on music, but maybe you disagree?

JOHN G. HANHARDT: No, I do think that. Obviously in terms of media there was something of an analog moment, but when I look at the image processor and the ways that Nam June Paik was able to imagine the flow and the change that is deposited in there, I see something else. I think it transcends that in a close reading of the work. If you look at his whole body of work and the fluidity of his thinking it becomes something where I think – just as he talks about this post-video space, which I think is a really interesting idea – he is also looking at it as digital. I am convinced that he straddled both.

**SARAH COOK:** If you could all join me in thanking John Hanhardt for his excellent keynote. ■



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