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Peter Weibel

Peter Weibel, has been pursuing interdisciplinary activities within the scientific, artistic as well as literary, photographic, graphic, plastic, and digital fields since 1966. From 1999 Weibel has been chairman of the ZKM Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie in Karlsruhe where he lives and works.

1

As I have said at several occasions, as a media artist Nam June Paik is very akin to Marshal McLuhan's media theory. The core of his artistic anthropology could be related to two famous probes of McLuhan. The first one is, "The most human thing about us is our technology". Thus, Nam June Paik built his famous robot - **Robot K-456** (1965). He linked natural phenomena like water and its waves to electromagnetic waves - vide **Versaille Fountain** (1992). And he linked more or less natural candlelight to artificial electric light - he put a candle into an empty TV set - **Buddha** (1989). Nam June Paik continuously rethought, reframed and recontextualized the relations between nature, technology, and human beings. The basis of his model of relationality and connectivity was the natural sensory organization of human beings changed by technology. Again Nam June Paik followed a famous probe of McLuhan, "Each new technology is a reprogramming of sensory life". The order of our natural sensory life has been modified by technology. Especially the harmony between our senses of proximity (touch) and our senses of distance (vision) are disequibrated. Our technology is built on machines and media enhancing and enforcing the senses of distance - tele means distant, far. Therefore, we have television, telephone, telefax – an expansion of sight, sound, and writing. Our technology is always tele-technology. Tele-technology reprograms our sensory life and, thus, our behavior in the environment.

Nam June Paik's anthropology defined technology as culture and culture as technology. Human beings are both the product of natural evolution and the parallel evolution of culture and technology. This goes

beyond the framework of what I have called in 1993 **Context Art**, the title of both an exhibition and a book, and what later in 1998 Nicolas Bourriaud called “relational aesthetics”. The aesthetics of Nam June Paik was defined by the relations between nature, technology, and human beings, a true artistic anthropology.

2

The concept of artistic anthropology is not medium-specific, since it deals with technology and its relations to nature and human beings - not with media and their relations to nature and human beings. Artistic anthropology goes beyond the media discourse. It understands all forms and means of expression as media, starting with writing as a first medium, a first storage and technical carrier medium. Artistic anthropology has a universal medium concept. Everything is a medium, even your body, even your hand, even your brain. Your body is the first interface between yourself and the world. Your natural organs are your first interfaces to the world. Technology creates a man-made environment with artificial man-made interfaces to interact with the environment. In that sense, artistic anthropology is in a postmedium condition.

3

Artistic anthropology is anthropotechnology, is media-anthropology, an anthropology of universal media. In that sense, it is a challenge to the established humanities. Before the 19th century, art was considered a production of experts with the competence and craft to create paintings, sculptures and architecture, commissioned by the mundane or spiritual aristocracy and to be presented in castles and churches. Modern art is understood as an expression of the individual, of the inner self, without any commission. Artistic anthropology puts the content of modern art into question. If a work designs relations between technology, nature and human beings, it is not an expression of the self. Its type of research is more scientific and innovative. It questions the traditional concepts of humanity.



Nam June Paik
TV Candle, 1975(1999).
Nam June Paik Art Center Collection



Nam June Paik
TV Fish, 1975(1997).
Nam June Paik Art Center Collection



Nam June Paik
TV Garden, 1974(2008).
Nam June Paik Art Center Collection