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“The world began without the human race and will certainly end without it.” This is one of the most frequently quoted sentences from Claude Lévi-Strauss’ *Tristes Tropiques* (1955) and I believe this represents an essential insight underlying anthropological thinking. While thinking about what humans are, it is always important to imagine the vast, non-human expanse outside the realm of humanity. So, in order to open a new area of knowledge about ourselves, to conceive an “anthropology” of any kind, I think it is essential to keep this background view in mind; the view that the human race occupies an extremely limited part of the universe both in space and in time. Through the development of modern technology and globalization, we have been persuaded for too long to believe that humans should seek infinite freedom and realize their unbounded possibilities. What we are will be defined by what we will achieve by pushing the frontier, by making an adventure into the unknown. Anthropology teaches us that such a view is sheer folly. The only way to know what we are is by realizing the fundamental limitations of humanity and to know the modest but distinct presence of the past rather than hyperbolized, futuristic visions.

I think the importance of this self-recognition should also be acknowledged in “artistic anthropology”. Artistic anthropology as signifying a change should be an alternative to traditional art history and replace art history as the norm by something to encompass multiple artistic activities in the world. Through the expansion of conceptual art and the emergence of post-conceptual practices after the 1990s, many historical descriptions of contemporary art are dominated, I believe, by an idea of dialectics of art driven by its inner logic.

Nicolas Bourriaud's "relational aesthetics" has no doubt prepared a new concept to make sense of various artistic practices for the last two decades, but it still seems to be restrained by the idea of art history as a norm, as a pivotal discourse to distribute meanings to art works, with its idea of "relations" remaining abstract and undefined.

In my view, whatever new paradigm we need to understand art in the 21st century should be formed through the process of radical decentralization. Just as knowledge in cultural anthropology becomes possible at all only when one frees oneself from often unspoken preconceptions about superiority of modernity and progress, "artistic anthropology" will be able to produce knowledge only when we get rid of vestiges of modernism and progression which still seem to exist in many post-modern, post-colonialist discourses.

Today, whether you are an artist, audience, art historian or art critic, you are placed in a situation of constant shift between the subject and the object. Like an anthropologist observing people in a certain local culture, in the contemporary situation of art you are always looking at and being looked at simultaneously. Although we still need modern institutions such as museums, academies and the art market, they are in the process of dissolution and reorganization. One of the most important things we learn from Nam June Paik is that a playful shift between the subject and the object (or the West and the East in some contexts) could be a powerful engine of artistic creation.

From the perspective of medium-specificity, I think we have to keep in mind that the real significance of a particular medium can only be understood in the particular chronological and geopolitical context art takes place. Our world is an assemblage not only of different areas, but also of different times where interpretations of time differ. The diagnosis of today's "post-medium condition" by Rosalind Krauss can effectively be applied to the territory where people have been directly and strongly influenced by Western modernism, but will be of no help in the rest of the world. And we should know that "the rest of the world" is expanding in both a geographical and institutional sense. In Japan, for example, we observe a dramatic expansion of art formerly called subculture or pop-culture, including manga, anime, culture of

games, digital gadgets, and so on. But none of us has as yet a proper theoretical platform for analyzing and discussing the issue, besides the propaganda notion of “cool Japan.” What I hope artistic anthropology can bring about is to secure such a platform. One great advantage of anthropological thinking is that it encourages us to pay attention to things and activities normally ignored as insignificant.

Finally, as to the problem of classification, I am not so much concerned with a spectacle showing a struggle between an old and a new form of knowledge as with the process of slow but steady erosion of old practices through new types of practices.

Let me conclude with a recent exhibition in Japan, which I think can be considered an example of artistic anthropology. It is **[Big Rest] Gardening for the Future 1,095m²**, a solo exhibition of Tadasu Takamine in Sendai Mediatheque during November 11 through December 24, 2008. I was officially involved in this project as the “supervisor”, but what I actually did was a series of discussions with the artist. Takamine organized a group of local people in the city of Sendai to collaborate with him and created a big “garden” in the middle of the exhibition space’s floor using various materials taken from an old local house that was scheduled to be torn down soon. He also presented some images from the Hanshin Awaji earthquake which took place in 1995. And he organized a group of visually impaired people to give a tour(!) for visitors. The work may sound like a medley of many heterogeneous elements - discussions with me as a “supervisor”, a workshop-style production process with local people, recycling stuff from a house being demolished, images of human powerlessness in the face of a natural disaster, and the controversial idea of deploying blind guides - but I experienced that the whole process of the **[Big Rest] Gardening for the Future 1,095m²** project yielded important knowledge about relations and connectivity based on a specific space/time. I hope that the notion of artistic anthropology will be able to produce a framework for discussing art practices like this project - and many similar emerging ones.