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Preface | *Video Digital Commons*

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NJP Reader #11
VIDEO DIGITAL COMMONS

Preface | *Video* *Digital Commons*

Lee Soo Young

Curator of Nam June Paik Art Center

In 2022, NJP Art Center is preparing Paik's new gift for the world and waiting for his 90th birthday. The gift is 'Paik's Video Study,' a digital archive that provides Paik's representative video works online. NJP Art Center is the only art museum in the world that houses Paik's video archive in a physical form. The archive consists of 2,285 videos, including single-channel videos purchased directly from the artist, various versions of broadcast programs, studies, performance videos, interview videos, sources for video sculptures and installations, and various footage collected by the artist. The video production process comprises storing, duplicating, editing, and completing an original source. Therefore, the archive contains videos that seem to have content unrelated to the titles at first glance, numerous edited versions of videos that look similar but have a difference, and several videos that reveal the traces of collaborators. The archive is directly related to Paik's visual aesthetics. Exploring this archive is like looking into the artist's head which is full of diverse interests and unrefined thoughts.

Paik's Video Study, which will be released in 2022, is a platform that allows viewers to enjoy Paik's video archive in a web environment. It is designed by archivist Sang Ae Park and includes single-channel videos, broadcast clips, documentaries of performances and exhibitions, sources of video sculptures, and installations stored in the video archive of NJP Art Center. Moreover, it also holds works that the NJP Art Center studied for the past ten years. By accessing Paik's Video Study via the web, users can stream videos. And they can also create and store their own video lists through 'Continue' and 'My Videos' functions.

From an archival perspective, Paik's Video Study seeks new ontological value. An archive is a collection of records whose purpose is to be preserved permanently. Records preserved in museums serve as historical materials showing each situation

differently from works and as evidence complementing contexts of works. However, Paik's Video Study, which will be released soon, functions in a different context from a traditional archive. Users will be able to find and create new meanings in the network of separate videos beyond their original purpose of accessing a video archive. Paik's Video Study can create a primary semantic map with primary keywords (criteria for classification such as people, events, works, exhibitions, eras, etc.) and a new network algorithm based on digital traces of users. In this way, the new network drawn by a machine learning module will allow us to see Paik's video from a new perspective, not from the existing historical and aesthetic perspective. For example, Edith Decker tried to grasp and understand the narratives, scene composition, editing methods, and footage to analyze Paik's single-channel videos. However, if a machine learning method were applied, it would be possible to understand Paik's video legacy anew by analyzing big data on the most searched video or the most played section in a video and the materials searched by users after watching a video.

The video archive is also interesting from a media archaeological perspective. Paik's video archive (although his early motion picture film works are excluded) stores various media such as his early videos converted from films, 2-inch, 1-inch, and 1/2-inch videotapes, 8mm and Super 8 films, Betamax, U-Matic, Laserdisc, and VHS. In the broad context of digitizing analog videos, NJP Art Center completed the first digitization of the video archive in 2012. The secondary digitization, which becomes a free video streaming platform, involves more diverse processes. It is related to various technological variables and the axiological issues that determine the variables. There are also pitfalls like a dangerous tightrope walk between analog and digital. Many of Paik's videos have already gone through a migration process from analog tapes

to digital tapes (Digibeta, to be exact). Moreover, the videos in Digibeta were converted back to a digital file format for Paik's Video Study service. When a video is converted from an analog medium to a digital medium, many differences emerge beyond the loss of information. As a convex analog monitor and a flat digital monitor do not reproduce the same signals, the brightness and color of lights, aspect ratio, distortion level, and resolution are all different from each other. Various interpretations can be made depending on a technical or aesthetic level.

In *NJP Reader #11*, six authors discuss the possibilities and limitations of Paik's Video Study from various perspectives. They look into the meaning of the unprecedented service in the world that provides an artist's video works for free online in connection with the future, the side effects, and the anticipated concerns and pitfalls that it will bring about.

Ma Jung Yeon approaches the structure of the archive that Paik envisioned in his head from the article "Random Access Information" published in 1980. She says that Paik was thinking about issues about access to information rather than issues about collecting information regarding the archive, on the basis of her research on Paik's Japanese manuscripts which are difficult to find in Korea. Furthermore, she predicts that the numerous editions of Paik's videos that emerged from the process of video production would be complicated problems in Paik's Video Study. She presents Paik's video editing method, which is likened to Bibimbap, and the reuse of footages as hints and sees that there is a creative relation making Paik's works on that point. For Paik, a relation is not a common literary cliché, but an actual connection in which objects and events are related and in which people are also intertwined with each other. In the future, we will be able to forge such a relation in Paik's Video Study.

Hyun Seewon says that problems of ‘time to access information’ suggested by Nam June Paik in “Random Access Information” were also mentioned in his article “Expanded Education for the Paperless Society” published in 1968. She also points out that Paik dealt with time as an object of ‘shortening’ and ‘breaking through.’ Personal memories and media devices such as records and videos can be used to shorten the time. Paik claimed that the archive, storage of knowledge transcending time, should be established. That means he thought that the archive that stored diverse knowledge and wisdom by shortening the time should serve as infrastructure such as expressways. Hyun focuses on education envisioned by Paik and unravels a relationship between teacher and students as a ‘dual identity focusing on learning.’ The process of teaching and learning between teachers and students with information as the center is a process of continuous interaction in which senses and information flow ceaselessly. Besides, it is impossible to simply divide students and teachers into subjects and objects. Paik’s Video Study will aim to be an ‘avant-garde think tank’ that prompts active and new learning for a new generation of visitors, although Paik’s original videos play the role of a teacher.

The discussion about archives is conceptually expanded further from Hanna Hölling’s post-preservation archive. Hölling’s discussion starts from the classical concept of the archive and develops into the concept of an archive that is gradually dematerialized. Her ‘virtual archive’ is an idea reached by circumventing Deleuze’s concepts about the actual and the virtual, an archive containing the realm of tacit knowledge, and Appadurai’s ‘the archive as the work of the imagination.’ One of the great fruits of her long study on Paik is that she revealed that the works that existed intermittently only in a form of installation like *TV garden* could not be activated without skills, memories, and tacit knowledge of individuals who possessed

knowledge of the works, archives, documents and libraries, explanations, devices. Therefore, she has arrived at a conclusion that all these things constitute Paik's virtual archive. She also anticipates the creative future that Paik's Video Study will bring by applying this conclusion. Her view is that videos, films, remixes, fragments, etc. will create new content and eventually bring new interactions. She foresees that Paik's Video Study, which creatively realizes the past, will ultimately become a virtual archive that makes Paik's works alive today.

Jung Sera, the founder, and director of a video art archive platform called 'The Stream,' presents various opinions on video digital archives. Her opinions are based on the need to recognize the difference in information between moving images and still images. She further argues that the potential value of digital video archives should be discovered on the digital bit structure and the screen.

Wolfgang Ernst proposes a media archaeological perspective for a media archive, linking the situation of the satellite live broadcast of *Good Morning, Mr. Orwell* in 1984 and our situation (thrown) in today's online conference environment due to COVID-19.

Ernst reminds us that our online symposium is a cybernetic circuit, a combination of technologies, and a technologue (conversation of technology), while at the same time approaches a fundamental problem of digital archives by revealing that all of these are technological situations in which analog signals are converted to digital signals. In several of his articles, he has emphasized how much the physical and ontological positions of archives become different in digital archives. It is a more fundamental issue in Paik's Video Study. Because the protagonist of Paik's Video Study is Nam June Paik who worked with analog videos. Ernst says that "A fundamental issue of the material Paik legacy is to preserve the integrity of the analog audio and video signal." and "a digital video

commons platform (...) dissimulates this media-epistemic difference between the analog and digital.” However, as Ernst emphasizes, the archive in NJP Art Center does not only preserve the software and data content of Paik videos. ‘The House Where the Spirit of Nam June Paik Lives on’¹ contains Paik’s video archive so that it preserves 2,285 videotapes in the storage that maintain optimal temperature and humidity conditions. Additionally, Paik’s various analog works including installations of video synthesizers are presented to the audience at exhibitions. Devices such as analog cameras, CRT monitors, and video synthesizers exchange analog signals with each other and display analog images in real-time without any problem. Paik’s Video Study, which will be released soon, is also a part of ‘The House Where the Spirit of Nam June Paik Lives on.’ However, the epistemological and ontological question of video digital archives posed by Ernst is very appropriate. It tells us that we are still faced with philosophical and aesthetic choices.²

Alexandra Juhasz returns to “Random Access Information” and “Expanded Education for the Paperless Society” and attempts a dialogue with Paik. However, another topic of this conversation is YouTube. Juhasz emphasizes that this massive platform with a huge amount of video is not a repository allowing random access that Paik expected, but a commercial entity armed with algorithms. Moreover, she affirms that “the only reason why videotape is so boring and television so bad (...) is that corporations and totalitarian regimes have joined forces to use human’s newfound access to digital tools of video capture, editing, sharing, and storing to allow us more access to the corruption wreaked by capital, the greedy, the dominant and deceitful.” These discussions are related to the principles which Juhasz set up for her small-scale VHS community archive work. They are linked to the use and need of a specific community for an archive, participation in a group environment,

and the use and purpose of the archive. Ultimately, these are connected to the theme of the video digital commons that NJP Art Center pursues. Although Juhasz's VHS archive is intended for a small community, the blueprint of Paik's Video Study began from the "video common market" that Paik mentioned in "Global Groove and Video Common Market" (1970). Through Paik's Video Study, we will be able to practice a new "video common market" in advance and complete a part of the "digital commons" through it.

In "Random Access Information", Paik said "It is not new or unnatural that time consciousness imitates tape reels because the tape has the same structure as trees. So, tape imitates trees, and we imitate tape reels." The tree mentioned in the article has an annual ring that can be seen when a wooden pillar is cut horizontally. As circles get smaller toward the center of a tree, the videotape is wound around the reel. Therefore, the tree (annual rings), videotapes, and our time experience have a linear structure and do not allow random access. However, Juhasz suggests that we should 'aim for the tree.' The tree is probably a vigorous tree with exuberant twigs and leaves. We don't know in which direction the tree will branch out. But we know that trees grow by spreading branches randomly with the goal of growth and life. When we access information or store a video, what we should aim for is to come to resemble a tree. Paik's Video Study should allow everyone to access it arbitrarily and abundantly like a tree.

Juhasz's argument is connected to 'getting lost in the archive' or 'taking a walk,' mentioned by Park Sang Ae at this symposium. She compares the experience of coming to find something in an archive full of data and searching new materials as if possessed by something else to 'getting lost.' This is probably in Paik's relation which Ma Jung Yeon remarked. Isn't this the point where digital archives and analog archives meet each other and also

the creative feedback we expect from Paik's Video Study?

Finally, the conclusion of *NJP Reader #11* is replaced by a written translation of the roundtable of the symposium held at NJP Art Center on November 27th, 2021. The roundtable was a place for researchers to talk with each other, reaffirm the possibilities of digital archives, and celebrate the beginning of Paik's Video Study. We would like to thank Park Sang Ae and CAMP (Shaina Anand and Ashok Sukumaran) for examining significant content through the symposium presentation. In addition, *NJP Reader #11* owes much to the meticulous work of curator Kwon Tae Hyun, who acted as a moderator at the roundtable, and editor Yun Ja Hyong, who recorded the conversation vividly and elaborated it for publication.

- 1 The name is which Nam June Paik gave in person. It also means the mission of Nam June Paik Art Center.

- 2 In fact, it is not a couple of days that we are faced with this choice. In a brief online conversation with Alex Zhuhasz before the symposium, Juhasz's response was hopeful. Because it reminded me that the core of the problem lay in our aesthetic and philosophical choices via ethical judgments of right or wrong. At the same time, it made me reconsider that creating a new archive was a process based on such a choice. In fact, we are already using several archive systems and building new ones. But in the case of Paik's Video Study, the decision process was difficult because it considers a large number of unspecified users and also has the meaning of revealing one artist's work.