February 4, Discussion

Hunyee Jung (Moderator): Good afternoon. Thank you all for being with us today. This morning we had a 30 minute discussion planned, but in order to have a longer overall discussion, we moved the session to the afternoon. Unfortunately, it looks like we only have around 45 minutes left so we will have to keep our comments short. I'm sure you have a lot of questions, but let me just take a few minutes to summarize some of today's highlights.

In the morning we focused on the themes of perspective and notions of time. What was time to Nam June Paik? We had two presentations that discussed this question in depth. Through discussions of this important question of what time and history meant to Nam June Paik, we were led to the even bigger question: What is art? Especially in the 21st century, what is art today?

Art may very well be the last myth of modern times. Now, art is subjugated to capitalism and globalization making today an opportune time to really think about what art is and what it was to Nam June Paik. It is high time we addressed this question.

Many people mentioned how contemporary artists are asking themselves how to sell their work and become part of the mainstream. We teach this in school, as well, how to write an artist's statement and how to write funding proposals. Capitalism has become very close to art during the last century and the critic has disappeared as a result.

The topic of our international seminar today is what art was to Nam June Paik, and what is art in general? I hope we can really think this through. Hannah Higgins showed us two charts during her talk. One was of Newton's stars and the

other was Minkowski's chart. Newton, as we learned in school through Newton's law, posited that you had your X and Y-axes representing space and time, but Minkowski proposed X, Y, and Z with t as time. This then became a cone-like form.

So, what Hannah said about linear time related to modernism and post-modernism was all about trying to get out of time. It is about attempting this, and these attempts are also linked to the early video work of Nam June Paik. He is trying to go beyond time. That attempt is also related to going beyond meaning, or as Hannah referred, going beyond language. People without a mother tongue, who talk in different languages, are like persons who are lost or sleeping. They are only able to scratch the surface and are unable to capture the core of things.

All this can be interlinked. Midori Yamamura talked about Levinas's 'pain of others.' Otherness, repetition, and being attached to something helps you find the meaning of the pain of others by putting yourself as one with their pain. You must go beyond yourself.

Midori's keyword was pain. Pain is again linked to the experience of colonialism, or youth in colonial times – that kind of absurd or contradicting situation and the pain suffered under colonial rule; all these concepts can be interlinked.

Suki Kim then discussed the tragedy of the intellectual in colonial times. His keyword was modernology.

Mary Bauermeister then talked about what art is. She answered the questions posed by the previous speakers and commented on the artist as an early warning system and knowing Paik's pain. She mentioned that although Paik was from a wealthy family, they were together in their destitution in Germany and understood one another's pain. She also discussed how one of Paik's contributions to her studio was his input of Buddhism as a kind of 'philosophical terrorism.'

Perhaps you also have questions on these topics. I don't want to talk for too long, although there is a lot to summarize, because I believe you also have many comments and questions.

To wrap up quickly, Seongho Haam talked about satellite broadcasting and *Good Morning Mr. Orwell*, which he watched, and about his doubts concerning Paik. It was a very impressive presentation about losing your mother tongue. What kind of language can one be left with without a mother tongue?

Listening to his presentation, I was reminded of a lecture of Paik's I heard in the US during the Gulf War of the 90s. What impressed me the most about that lecture was Paik's claim that in the 21st century, Bulgaria would become the world leader in art. This was because Bulgaria had the highest investment in ESP. I didn't know what ESP was at the time, so I asked a colleague and was told it had to do with telepathy. Paik's remark was tongue-in-cheek, but today, as we talked about what art is and how to communicate through art, I was reminded of this comment.

A question on losing language was Paik really slipping further and further away through his experience of losing his mother tongue? If we are to resist capitalism, what kind of new communication do we need and what kind of new art? Perhaps the answer really is telepathy. Maybe this was also what attracted Paik to satellite art. I will end here and instead open the floor for questions from the audience.

Please feel free to ask questions and panelists, too, feel free to make any additional comments. However, do keep in mind that if you speak for too long, we will not be able to give too much time to questions from the floor.

Question from the audience: Good afternoon. Thank you very much for this great opportunity. I have a question for Mary Bauermeister and Seongho Haam. First to Mr. Haam: You talked about how Paik's art also came from the lack of a mother tongue and how he was slipping between languages as well as the fact that he was not physically on the Korean peninsula. However, he was still deeply influenced by his experience of colonialism in his youth and as a result had these very violent and radical performances in the very beginning of his career as an artist. Ms. Bauermeister, you were with him during these performances and if so

I would like to know, do you agree? Since Nam June Paik is no longer with us, all we have now are the discussions he had with you and his other friends. I would liked to have seen Paik and to have asked him directly what his thoughts were on Mr. Haam's comments, but since he is not here, I would like to ask Mary.

Mary Bauermeister: I would say he would agree, but he would not have put it as a disadvantage. If we were to talk about it, he would have seen it as a strong point, an advantage. We had one thought in common, which we rehearsed many times. That was, whatever you cannot escape, and cannot deflect, – embrace. It is an Asian strategy. Sometimes I saw Paik disappointed, or, as we might in a Western way, call almost angry, but he would not show true anger because we rehearsed against it. Whenever something bothers us, we should tell ourselves to stop resisting and not build a wall against it. When you build a wall, it cements the emotions and they are able to continue to harm you. In Germany we like to say, "Whatever hurts you is yours."

Instead you must indentify that which hurts you or is harmful to you and understand it, so we would practice this. Whenever someone would do something hurtful we would stop. We would not react. We would be silent and neutral and then reflect on and learn from what had happened. I would definitely say yes. He was in between language, in a space of hopelessness. However, to him it was like a dream. In a dream you see something horrible and you run away from it, but the message is really to approach what you are afraid of. You have to encounter your fears. Otherwise you can never know yourself. Our shadows always show up in fears, in sudden moments, and in dreams. In any case, he would agree and embrace it and say yes to it.

Hunyee Jung (Moderator): Mr. Haam, do you have any questions or comments? Do you have anything to add concerning this question?

Seongho Haam: No, I don't have any further comments.

Hunyee Jung (Moderator): I have a question. You mentioned in your lecture, and also Mr. Suki Kim talked about, the poet Yi Sang. Mr. Haam, you men-

tioned how this related to the different perspectives concerning Paik. The poet Yi Sang was an avant-garde poet. He was also imprisoned in Japan where he died from an illness. It is rumored that he wanted to eat a lemon or a melon – some people say melon, some people say lemon – just before his death. Whether it was a lemon or a melon, the fact is that they are both Western fruits with very fragrant aromas and were not easily available in Korea at that time. In that sense, it may have represented a desire for something Western: a desire for a certain scent, for something new and unfamiliar. I really see that as the irony and the controversy concerning intellectuals during colonial times. Would you say that you would have the same interpretation about Yi Sang as you do of Paik?

Seongho Haam: I believe the standards would be a bit different for the poet Yi-sang than they would for Paik. I think that Yi-sang takes this idea to a more extreme end than Paik. I am an architect by profession and Yi-sang was also an architect by training and obviously he studied Western architecture because, at that time, Eastern architecture was not in textbooks. Everyone who studied architecture studied either Western architecture or Japanese architecture, so the influence of his architectural studies can be seen in his poems. There is one poem of his that has dots along certain lines and if you look closely you can see that it is the layout of a palace found in Babylon. It has one hundred columns and the columns were all represented as dots in his poem. That's what I think of his poetry. Since he studied Western architecture and the history of Western architecture, he probably had a desire to know about the West. That desire to know is something that led to his desire to actually experience something with his own body, so someone with this kind of desire is different from Paik. Paik was a nomad, and he went abroad because of the Korean War, but I believe that he would have lived abroad even if there had been no war. In the case of the poet Yi-sang, he had the desire to fly, but he could not fly. He wanted to fly, but in truth he was unable to go anywhere. And, so, he was this locked up genius.

Hunyee Jung (Moderator): So then if those were examples of modern

artists, what kind of language needs to be used by this century's artists? For example, you talked about how Paik had no mother tongue, and how his language was a colonial language. So what we are speaking now? Is it our mother tongue? I'm not trying to pick a fight with you. What I'm trying to ask is, when we communicate with the West or try to accept the West, then what do we need to go beyond, what do we need to criticize? I also want to ask Midori this same question. Midori, you discussed the duality or otherness of multiplicity of existence, and through Levinas you said that we could already go beyond ourselves within ourselves. If that is otherness, it is something that forces me to go beyond myself. It is easy to critique a stance, but what I am trying to ask is, as an artist, what kind of language do I need to use?

Seongho Haam: I do not think we can actually critique any of this because we do not have a single language. Even our language, Hangul, also has some Chinese characters mixed in. Koreans here use Hangul, pure Korean, plus Chinese characters, so we are also in between, in limbo. I am not trying to say Hangul is bad or that we should not use it. I am just noting that we created our own characters and we actually lost two important aspects of culture by doing so.

One was the loss of a global language with the loss of Chinese characters. During the Joseon Dynasty, intellectuals used Chinese characters and by doing so learned the language of the superpower China. They could communicate with the superpower through writing because they knew their language, and the Chinese could understand papers written by Korean authors.

The second aspect we lost was access to our own traditional literature. Our traditional literature is all written in Chinese characters, so we do not have classics. Of course we have classics, but we cannot read them. We have lost that language: the language of Chinese characters. We can no longer have a renaissance because we do not have our own classic literature. What kind of renaissance can you expect from people who do not have classical roots?

We must overcome the struggle between the Korean language of Hangul and

Chinese characters. This is not just a Korean problem. It is the same for English and for French. In speech, today's global era becomes most apparent because we hear a mish-mash of languages. In Korea, philosophers will sometimes use German or French to explain different ideas. This is not unique to Korea.

Hunyee Jung (Moderator): Maybe in the future we will need to use telepathy to talk with one another.

Seongho Haam: I am not saying that we should do that. It is not about this language or that language. We need to focus on that limbo or the gap between languages to enrich languages themselves.

Hannah Higgins: I would like to hear Midori answer the question.

Midori Yamamura: I think Mary would also like to say something. I would like to comment on Professor Jung's question. I think Paik believed all cultures are hybrids. In the case of Japan, Koreans first went to Japan a very long time ago to the imperial family in Nara, the old capital, which also means 'state' in Korean. I think every culture has its hybrid aspects. We cannot talk about 'pure culture.' My presentation was not so much about otherness as it was about the infinity that came out of totalitarian society. I also have a question. Do you think modernism is over? Because capitalism never ended. I came upon Levinas when I started questioning the Bush administration. During his time as president, it was really like we were losing wars, and it almost felt like a totalitarian society. How can we speak if language loses its meaning? Or becomes subjective? This is what we consider postmodernism. I started looking right after World War II, and I think this is in line with Mary's comments, and I found that there was this moment when people tried to become themselves and to define otherness within.

Hunyee Jung (Moderator): I heard that infinity and totalitarianism was a criticism of the ontology of Heidegger. I think that may be an issue that goes beyond today's seminar. But, Professor Higgins, what do you think about modernism and postmodernism? Are we at the end of modernism?

Hannah Higgins: I think ultimately this is one of the ideas that Pamela Lee is trying to discuss in her work, because what she's really setting up is a model of anxiety about the nature of the start-time and a kind of sureness about the process of history that at least in the West is characteristic of modernity. So this, of course, has been shaped in different ways. There's obviously the idea that the avant-garde is a kind of postmodern within the modern, so even there we're dealing with precisely the same kind of hybridizations as we are when we begin to speak across cultures. Therefore, I think that Midori is making an excellent point.

One thought I did have in sitting through these various papers today was the idea that if we really characterize the 20th century as the bloodiest century in world history, these kinds of shifts in language where language is breaking down and a sense of historic time is breaking down are classic within the field of trauma theory. As something that trauma ties people to; they become distanced from language, and they lose a sense of mother tongue. They lose a sense of the meaning of language – of language as authentic.

So I would like to add to this a kind of psychologizing dimension to have us think and perhaps internalize some of this logic of hybridization and these issues of language in terms of these very direct experiences with war. Beuys is a great example, incidentally, of this. Beuys was not just watching in World War II. He was a soldier. He had his hands in the battle and he was very deeply traumatized. For anyone who's interested, you should read this wonderful book by Susan Sontag called Regarding the Pain of Others. It is only about 70 pages long and is on this issue and very interesting. It speaks specifically, I think, to Midori's observations.

Mary Bauermeister: Also the language question – I did not understand completely what was said here. It is as if today we are scientists who explain the subtleties of Sanskrit or old Aramaic languages. Soon there will be people who translate the subtleties of each extant language. I assume we will develop completely new languages in the future and this development will really be spurred on

by new media. When I see my grandchildren on their cell phones, the sentences they use are like a foreign language. It is a completely new break from what I know and it is global. I think we will develop a global language and all the language subtleties of the past will be kept as part of historical knowledge. Just as today we have Sanskrit scholars. There is another interesting aspect to language called pre-language. I call it telepathic understanding, and it represents a completely different level of understanding than spoken language. When we use language we develop our thinking; therefore, new media will give us a completely different way of thinking and I'm very curious to see what that may be.

Hunyee Jung (Moderator): Thank you very much. Are there any other questions?

Bazon Brock: I just want to comment on Mr. Haam's question about who is the one who is caged. It is true that Paik spoke of himself as someone who had escaped. In Europe, people who have escaped are called refugees. In the 50s and 60s, then, Germany was full of refugees who had the common experience of thinking the future of mankind was hopeless, and we also perfected how to communicate about a situation which we had escaped from alive, but without our wealth. We asked ourselves, why would you want to escape if it means you would lose everything? Paik said it was all very easy to understand. That is the national character of the Korean people. Paik came from a family of collaborators.

This was a bad word in those days, collaborators. It meant that you should not wait until the enemy came to conquer your country, but invite him to come first. Especially between Japan and Korea it was very understandable too. At least as a Korean collaborator family, asking the Japanese to invade was a manner of coming back to the roots. The logic follows that the cultural roots of Japan are in Korea.

The understanding was then if everyone were to go back to their roots, the Japanese would go to Korea, the Koreans to China, the Chinese to North India, and so on and so forth. The whole film of history would run backwards until

we had all gathered in East Africa because it is the root of all mankind. Just think, what would it mean if, in those days, 3.5 billion people were to gather in East Africa? As Paik put it, he was just preparing the way. He was creating the way to go back to East Africa. The main effect was that he understood the relation between Japan and Korea as one of a superior Korean past and an invitation of the Japanese into that past as a way to return home. So, 'the way back home,' is another way to express the Japanese invasion of Korea.

Seongho Haam: Before there are more misunderstandings, although going back to East Africa is what we talked about just now, this is what I think: wherever we are, here, now, is what we need to focus on. We do not have to find our way back home, but we have to focus on here and now. That is what I really believe.

Let us look at, for a moment, a person by the name of Yagyong Jung from Korean history. Yagyoung was sent to Gang-jin as a form of punishment. In those times instead of imprisoning someone they would send someone to an isolated area as punishment. That was the system in Korea. Yagyong Jung was sent away to a far off area as a punishment and there he planted vegetables and herbs. One day an old man saw him and remarked, "You are here as a punishment, why are you planting vegetables and herbs here?" to which Yagyong Jung replied, "I am a nomad. I can go anywhere and wherever I find myself will be my place." If you are a nomad, then you will always feel like the place you are is home. However, there are some people that feel uprooted even when they are at home.

Hunyee Jung (Moderator): If you look at the leftists in the 80s in Germany they are one example. We talked about the social despair and hopelessness that descended when East Germany fell. Those intellectuals in the 80s, they must have felt uprooted.

Seongho Haam: I would advise them to be stronger. Voltaire or some other thinker said, "Wherever you are, missing home is for the weak. And wherever you are, if you feel at home, then you are strong. However, the strongest are

the ones that think their home is an alien place."

Hunyee Jung (Moderator): We only have about ten minutes left, so let us return to art and the role of art today. This may seem like a mundane question, but it is one worth addressing. What kind of hope can we give to art? How can art really change society? Can we really demand that art still serve as a social critique? I would like to invite everyone to say a few words. Maybe Mr. Kim can go first as he has been quiet thus far.

Suki Kim: At the beginning of my talk, as a way of confession I said that I rediscovered Paik. Of course I still need to study him further, but in 1984 at a TV station when I listened to Paik's talk, I was really disappointed. But looking at the Now Jump exhibition here, I see now that I really misunderstood Paik. I feel fortunate that I could correct myself, even belatedly. In Korea, if you look at the art scene it might seem similar to what we see in other countries. The speed of commercialization is horrendous and is happening much too rapidly. On the other hand, the work of artists like Paik, even if we just consider his work from the 60s, still seems fresh. You can see his commitment to his art and a devotion to his work. I feel this type of role model is disappearing today and I find that disappointing.

Question from the audience: I do not think Nam June Paik did not know himself. I think he knew himself very well. That is probably why he went to study abroad in Europe. If you look at his work in Germany, you can see that he was looking for something very fundamental in art. He was trying to find a way to sympathize with art. I would like to learn more about this. What are the fundamentals of art? This is my question. Nam June Paik looked for the fundamentals of art.

Hunyee Jung (Moderator): what are the fundamentals of art? It is a broad question but it is something that we need to continue to explore.

Seongho Haam: Let me keep my comments brief. I think if art does not expand our thinking then it does not need to exist. Art must create another horizon for people. I think that is the role of art today.

Mary Bauermeister: I have spoken for too long already so I will keep my comments short. I would say art should raise and expand our consciousness. In that sense, I would just say wake up. Or stay awake, do not fall asleep.

Hannah Higgins: I would actually take up a little bit of something Mary said earlier with regard to Paik's interest. I understood the question to be more what was fundamental about Paik – what was he actually trying to get at. That was my understanding of the question. I think Mary's observation with that robot piece, that he was driving a wedge of humanist interest, was on target. Bringing a humanizing field into a technology, which, by way even of people like Marshall McLuhan, was not physical somehow. It was assumed to be a part of something you can touch, and I think that in Paik's work and maybe less in his later work, but especially in his early work, there is that sense of touch and humanism in the technology. That for me is very fundamental and it's something I take away from him, and I think that's what I understood from Mary's observation earlier.

Midori Yamamura: I think in terms of what you asked, beginning to find out how to become post-capitalist is fundamental. When I look at New York, now all they think about is money and art does not really convey anything because it has become very conceptual. You have to read about art. Not to sense it or feel it, just as Hannah said. It needs to retain more humanism and I think that in that sense, I think Paik is still so ahead of many contemporary artists today.

Hunyee Jung (Moderator): We are really out of time for today. Thank you very much for joining us. Today is the day that we celebrate the start of spring according to the lunar calendar, and I believe that talking about the gifts of Nam June Paik through this international seminar on this day of the start of spring is very significant. So we start off the spring of this year with this gift, and I hope that we will continue to feel warmer and warmer. Mr. Youngchul Lee, who was Nam June Paik to us?

Youngchul Lee: Today they say we are celebrating the beginning of spring. When you say, "New Year" in Korea some people say it is January 1st, while others

say it is the lunar New Year. Still others say the New Year starts only when spring comes. In any case, we are here at the start of spring talking about Nam June Paik in terms of his legacy. We have heard so many different perspectives today and I believe this is another gift from him. I believe all these discussions are gifts we can receive from him. During our discussion today and the one we will have tomorrow, we will continue to explore this idea of Nam June Paik's gift to us.

If I may, though, I will go straight to the point. We talked about home, time, historical context, and colonialism. Many different ideas were discussed. Since we were talking about Paik's early years, we could not ignore what happened to him before he left Korea. If this seminar was held in any other country, we would not be able to discuss this in this way. This is something we must do as Koreans, to talk about the early years of Nam June Paik.

That was actually a hidden part of Nam June Paik's history. After he left Korea in the 1950s, he did not return to the country where he was born for over 30 years, even though his parents and family members were still in Korea. Not coming back to Korea for so long must have had its reasons, and its pain.

Art in today's society is very complex and in the late 20th century, we have had a lot of different types of criticism. Now, we have postmodernism and media technology. Art is being discussed, and again there are many layers and complexities and nothing is black-and-white. For example, Andy Warhol opened the possibility of making copies for capitalism. He even went as far as saying: "I would rather be a machine." He meant this because as a machine, he could make more copies. Paik, on the other hand, talked a lot about the moon. I think Paik studied lunar calendars and the universe, and even suggested that the moon may have been the first TV. Hannah Higgins talked about the overlap of art and communication and the video art of Paik. Art and communication went beyond Marcel Duchamp, said Paik. I see this as a kind of challenge Paik gave us. Andy Warhol said that as a copy artist he would rather be a machine, but Paik said, "I am an artificial satellite" like the moon, orbiting the earth. The moon gives us rest,

visions, and dreams.

We look at the moon and write poetry, so as a dreamer, Paik studied his art and he thought technology could get him closer to his dreams. That was why he studied technology. There was no direct relation between Korea and Paik, but there were indirect relations through telecommunications, through phones, or through other media. Through all these means of communication he was able to know what was happening in Korea, and after Paik became famous and came back to Korea, the market wanted to use him.

Paik played an important role in bringing the Whitney Biennial to Korea. A foreign biennial coming to Korea was a very unique event. This is a good example of leftist nationalism. Because Paik was a supporter of leftist nationalism, the Whitney Biennial could come to Korea. However, the Whitney Biennial coming to Korea was also criticized as another version of cultural colonialism and this also resulted in the criticism of Paik. The Gwangju Biennial was also created with the help of Paik. I have said a lot already, so I will continue tomorrow. Thank you.