The Triumphal Arch

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Thank you. Hello to everybody. I am going to draw up some guidelines for your exposure to Paik today. I will start by commenting on the logo of the Nam June Paik Art Center. It is a picture of two barns. It means that within a given situation, room, or institution, there may be borders, and within these there will always be questions. Anyone with a problem will ask a question. Someone without a problem does not ask questions. So, how do you answer the question without deepening the problem from which the question arose?

This is all quite rational according to Western thought. As a scientist or an artist doing research, you find that the more you study, the deeper you come into the problem as being unsolvable. Because problem-solving is a facade. You solve a problem by creating new problems. It does not mean much to say, 'I am capable, as someone working in the field of art or science, to solve problems.' It is more important, and it is more rational, and it is more direct in the philosophy of science, to say all research deepens the problem. After forty years of studying a problem, it becomes deeper and deeper. Therefore asking a question is followed by an answer that is a question. And this deepens the problem. And this goes on into eternity.

That is the logo. In a given situation you ask a question which can only be answered by raising deeper questions. And this goes on and on and on. Being familiar with a problem does not necessarily mean you get an answer. You are not asking for an answer. Instead it means one understands the problem as principally unsolvable. That is the logo.

Now, let us prove the avant-garde position of Paik. Everybody talks about Paik as being an outstanding avant-gardist, so let us talk about the definition of avant-garde. There is only one definition of avant-garde that really makes sense. All the others are just collected by chance and are not systematically understood.

If the orientation of modernity is guided towards finding what is new, then the new has no classification or no content, it has no distinctions whatsoever. As it is new, it is unknown. So how could you handle the unknown you have just provoked? You can destroy it. You can deny it. Or you can make proper use of the new by directing it at the opposite of the new and that is the old – traditions.

The function of newness in modern science and the avant-garde in art is to get a new orientation in relation to the past and tradition. Towards that which you and everybody else in your culture group or research family is fed up with. So the function of the avant-garde is to create tradition, and the only definition that should be considered as being avant-garde is one that forces us to develop completely new aspects of the traditions of the old.

For example in the piece called *Triumph Arc*. [Image 18. p179] Paik uses TVs to form the shape of a classical triumph arc that is a sign of victory for a general or an emperor, a victory over some enemy, whoever they might have been. This arc he is referring to is the arc of Constantine the Great built in Rome around 322, and there is something very important about the inscriptions in the 'attica' of this arc. It says, 'How could Constantine manage to achieve all these great effects on history, on installing a new religion as the state religion like Christianity. How?'

The answer is *INSTINCTV · DIVINITATIS · MENTIS · MAGNITVDINE*. Through his instinct for deity, for the gods and the openness of his mind, he was capable of doing all of this. *Instinctu divinitatis* is the term Paik refers to. The TV program shows the iconography as an analogy of the iconography of the triumph arc of Constantine the Great.

By using a TV set as a carrier for iconography, he is reinterpreting the

historical practice of having the iconography as relief in marble or stone, and no one has the ability to change the program except by saying the persons shown on this arc are punished by the loss of memory. They try to destroy this special part dedicated to the person who is punished to fall into forgetfulness. That was the only way to change the program. With Paik's avant-garde media of TV, he forces us to have a completely new and fresh insight into the logic of a triumph arc.

Also he never sticks to just one aspect of the problem of art. The next problem arises because TV is something he considers as machinery. Not mechanization, but machinery. That is a new unit of manpower and machines. For instance an artificial intelligence driven robot. The program of Paik's works spreads to different aspects of the general problems. For instance, what status is given to technology by this kind of use of TV? The use is quite important as there is only one historical definition of why in the fifteenth or fourteenth century in Europe something like art was developed. Of course, all the cultures of all times had craftsmen and ornaments and so on, but the invention of art was something completely different. It was necessary to invent art and these special aspects of science when people learned that they do not have to trust their eyes. It was said that your brain was there to see, so this was criticism of the eyes. This means criticism of getting the wrong impression just by looking at things. You have to think about them and think about the kind of awareness you get from this impression you fix your view on. Stop seeing with your eyes means criticize the evidence. However, criticism of evidence can only be fulfilled by creating evidence. Paik knew every aspect of these problems, historically and systematically. You could begin a discussion with him and wherever you started he was able to follow and to contribute his point of view. For instance, it is blasphemy to create an image of God. Normally people understand that if it is forbidden to create an image of God, then you should not. But this has no logic. The logic is the fulfillment of the forbidden. "It is forbidden to create an image of God," can only be fulfilled by painting or by creating an image of God, so creating an image is the evidence of your ability

to criticize evidence. “Do not make an image of God.” This statement can only be fulfilled by an image. Therefore, artists like Rothko, Motherwell in America in the fifties and so on, started to fulfill this statement. Since they were Jewish, they started for the first time in the Jewish community to show that you needed to paint in order to complete the statement, “Do not create an image of God.” This was new to the Jewish and Muslim communities, but not to Christians, who had been creating images for 600 years. If you were not to paint, then you would have done nothing. So what is the point? You have to paint as a way of giving evidence to the criticism of evidence.

It is the same with science. A scientist criticizes his evidence by his natural view, because our eyes cannot see anything within the micro or the macro cosmos. We can only see what lies in the middle. So the scientist criticizes his ability to see something by building instruments. The instruments are the criticism of his natural ability to see something. He does not see anything with his own senses, so the numbers or indicators show he is capable of criticizing his own way of viewing the world.

One idea Paik refers to as being avant-garde is that knowing new media is only possible by confronting the new media with older, traditional media. Then if you were forced to develop a completely new aspect to these known traditions you can be sure that it really has the impact of the true avant-garde.

We can learn a lot about Constantine’s time, roughly the 4th century AD, by looking at triumph arcs. That was a time when this type of architecture was exported to the early Christian churches. Therefore, the Christians knew about the logic of a triumph arc. Secondly, he knew that new media is a kind of machinery to fulfill the general aspect of being modern. That means radically criticize all evidence which you think is given by building up more evidence. But on a higher level, of course.

Then what kind of machinery is he using when you start confronting this new media with something traditional, something you thought was quite com-

mon? You could say, for example, it is the opposition of the rational to the irrational: technology to religion, or science to culture, or civilization to culture, because this opposition is very much misunderstood. Rationality in the West never means the confrontation of rational and irrational. It means to make proper use of the irrational.

If you have the altar, the priest prepares rituals on one side only. This is quite rational. He does this to not confront the other side of the altar to keep sacred the border between this side and that side, between human and gods and so on.

You can only be rational by being able to make rational use of the irrational. This becomes evident if you follow Paik's logic. The TV is not in opposition to, for example, theology (if we use theology as the main aspect of culture). TV is not the opposite, but instead it is the fulfillment. Technology is the fulfillment of theological ideas. For instance, as indicated on the right-hand side of the foreground of the image, you have the classical shrine in which Christians normally bury their dead until they are resurrected to life by Jesus and God at the end of time. When the end of time comes, to release the resurrected dead, they must open the lid of the shrine and when they do, they produce a noise of stone gliding over stone. This is called the music of resurrection. This noise is an indicator of resurrection, of the revitalization of the dead.

Now the confrontation of Paik: everybody understands that technology is equivalent to the Christian promise of resurrection. If you take a video of a person and then the person passes away, you can just press play on your video and you will have him back to life once again, in exactly the same form as he was when he was still alive. You no longer need to memorize the absent person. You can simply look at your pictures or movies. Technology is, therefore, a method for us to, in the theological sense, maintain perpetuity, or eternity. How does eternity occur to us in our now so-called technology poisoned society? By pushing the play button.

Technology is a fulfillment of this promise. There will be perpetuity by re-

calling the dead to life. If you have a film of your grandfather who died ten years ago and you show it to your children, he is resurrected. In exactly the same sense as every Christian ever thought.

Paik is an avant-gardist because he forces us to reinterpret the classical form of a triumph arc even with the historical aspect of transferring this into the early churches of the Christian communities. So, avant-garde is only that which forces us to develop completely new relationships towards the old and the traditional, and it does this by using media.

Media is the mediation between two given essences, or aspects, or positions, and this normally is called the Holy Spirit. The Christians believe in the trinity; God as the Hindu see him is completely different and is meant as a logical procession and not a belief in the center of irrational beliefs. Being forced to understand the evidence, we say that if something is given, it is God, and since there is someone who calls God, "God," – man – there must also be the opportunity to develop a relation between the two, the Holy Spirit. So one and one, God and man is always three. That means the one unit, the other unit, and the relation, or relativity.

Of course it is the Holy Spirit evoked by this idea of media, even technology media, as incorporations of the Holy Spirit, and of course for Buddhists this is quite easy to understand. Buddhists have no trouble understanding this concept. This was Paik's gift to Western societies in terms of their self-understanding. From ancient times, 500 BC or so, in Asia where Buddhism began, it was quite natural to understand this kind of modernity. Therefore, modernity is the most traditional term. You have to be modern. You have been modern since 500yeas before Christ, since Buddha came up with these ideas.

This was quite astonishing because we always thought that there should be a gap between the East and the West. There should be differences in qualities and history and so on. Paik demonstrated through almost every one of his actions or performances or happenings or Fluxus actions that there is no way of separat-

ing historical traditions if you look upon the Japanese or the Korean or the Chinese tradition under the pressure of the new. New media and new technology, it turns out that they all are just one because you have to build a trinity; for example, the past, the present, and the future; or semantics, tantics, and pragmatics; or for the quality of a sign. Everything given in the world for us has the structure of trinity.

We learned about this as being completely rational to be argued upon in every aspect only by being confronted with the newness of the new – the emptiness of space, or the whiteness of the canvas by the experience of people trying to destroy the new in fascist regimes or totalitarian regimes, the provocation of the new. All psychologists tell us that they deny it. Like Freud had said, what I tell you is how you deny the new. How you deny, or to be awake and be prepared to be confronted or exposed to the new.

It is only in modern times of science and art that you have the understanding that there is no ability of escaping the trinity. That means the effectiveness of mind, and again it is Buddhism. Because all these questions are put into the world by asking someone, how can I, by a spiritual operation, by mind and spirit, affect the material world? That is the question. Though it is normally said it is a miracle for someone to be able to move objects in the material world by the power of his mind, you are all capable of doing it.

I want now to put my finger up here and show you this sign of intention. Just think about what this might mean as a way of indication, and it is indicating a unit, of course, as a trinity.

Technology is a fulfillment of theology. By technology we are most effectively transferring spiritual power into a material reality, and, in any case, we are fulfilling our theological promises that we made without the concrete ability to realize it. We just believed it. But now, we are no longer forced to believe it, we know it, because it is a right of rational argumentation.

The avant-garde aspect then forced us to have new aspects on the triumph arc

as a historical form. Within the previously referred inscription *instinctu divinitatis*, which means the instinct for the deity, this can be found. That is fantastic. These are formulations you will find in Buddhism, too.

Technology as media and the demonstration of how it works is the music of perpetuity, or eternity, or resurrection, which just depends on which term fits best with your argument.

The second aspect of Paik, I will try to get it all in but we do not have much time left – only ten more minutes. He emphasized his friendship with Piene, Mack and Uecker and the Zero people, and we know a very important Western theologian, St. Augustine, said that the definition of men widens every other definition of living units. He said, *Initium ut esset homo creatus est.Initium ut esset* means if there is a principle of starting over and over from point zero and again from point zero, then, if this is a necessity for us all, as human beings, as a nation, after the war, after the catastrophe you have to start again. But even after a personal experience within your family you will always have to start again. If you do not have a desire to commit suicide, but instead to start again, then you have the deepest reason for your existence.

You are the starter.

You know what the starter is in terms of technology – a marker and a starter. Marking by drawing a line means that you start to differentiate, and this means by just one line you produce an opposition of left and right or up and down, weak and hard, or human and heavenly. A starter initiates again and again what really is the most important aspect of experience in life, this being the deepest insight into Christian and modern ideology, the experience that there is only one reason to be optimistic about starting and starting again. Evidence is given that it does not really make a difference if I get up in the morning or not, or if I stay in bed or brush my teeth or not. After all, everything is, in the end, just stardust. Even Beethoven and Einstein. Their music and their art will be stardust. Why should we start again when in the end, and the end is very near sometimes, everything becomes star-

dust? Like in these times. The end is very near in the shape of a catastrophe. Why should we again and again sit here and think together about the aspect of how we manage problems because we cannot solve them? How do we manage them? Because we cannot solve them. How should we communicate again and again? Because we know that we cannot understand each other. Why? That is the logic of Christianity.

John's apocalypse is a completely rational argument that the deepest criticism you are capable of is finding your optimism. There is no other way to be really optimistic, not naïve, but substantially optimistic, than by having undergone radical criticism. Let me explain further.

Radical criticism means you have to be dedicated to the end of an operation. For instance, a table-maker, the end of his operation is the definite image of a table, so he starts with the end of his operation – the definite definition of a table. He starts with his end. In his end is his beginning.

If you are as vivid, agile, interested, and enthusiastic as Director Lee demonstrated this morning, then, of course, you can be naïve, but he is not naïve. He has the base for his enthusiasm, for his interest. That is he has undergone the deepest criticism and asked, "What is it all about? If in the end everything is just stardust, what is it?"

In everyday life, for that is the anthropological dimension of Paik, like every other scientist, Paik fits perfectly in this special aspect by being apocalyptic through laughter. Laughter is the unit. Performing the laugh is the unit of apocalyptic, radical criticism and naivety and the substance of optimism.

We freed Cage from his cage with the help of Paik. He was a singing bird. In Asia, they kept the singing birds, under the barn of the prison built by Suzuki's ideas, so Suzuki was the barn maker for the prisons of Western Buddhism – completely the opposite to Chinese and Korean Buddhism. This is why Paik was so angry about Cage's love of Suzuki's ideas.

If you sit in a cage or a cave, then your family is hungry, so you have to

go outside to get some food. But you know, when you poke your head out of the cave, some animal may come and eat you. Snakes and poison and danger are all around. There is only one way to really manage the confrontation or exposure to these dangers and that is by working through them again and again by anticipation.

Anticipation of the most radical dangers you can think of is the only way to protect yourself. If you start racing cars today, you do not go immediately through the course 100,000 times. You sit there and visualize the course and go through it mentally. You anticipate the bumps and turns in the road and, in this way, learn. You do this because it is too dangerous to actually practice on the course, so automobilists learn not by doing but by anticipation.

A tennis player can anticipate his opponent's stroke even though the opponent has not finished his stroke. The ability to anticipate is the essential ability you need. If radical anticipation of what is really happening does not develop, then life is deadly. Of course then you have to come to the very point of starting again and again so being optimistic by having anticipated nearly every possible danger. It is a power, an ability of mankind, empathy, but I will not have time to explain this. We start with the principle, the aim of every man to start again and again by being optimistic after having undergone radical criticism. In this way, nothing could happen which he had not anticipated and expected. This is the source of Western criticism. You know when you say, all artists, all scientists, thinkers, as I heard today, are hypocrites. That is the function. That is the substantial founding of optimism in everyday life.

Starting at zero. The group was called Zero because they tried to start again and again. Think of yourself as a painter who starts again and again every day after having finished one painting. Let us say it is quite obvious that every painter does not paint just one nude female and one pot of flowers, but in fact paints dozens. He finishes one and starts again. Practicing as an artist is all about starting again and again. That is the only way to show that you are an artist and a

painter. You are one who is able to start again and again, and the same goes for scientists. Zero.

The indication for zero is, of course, what triumph means in general. It is not triumph just in the sense of he was a great general. It is the triumph over being forgotten, or about the loss of memory. It is a triumph about death. The real triumph is the triumph over death in the sense that death is permanent, but without being managed by us; or, by this kind of artistic and scientific work.

Next aspect. Let us say, a dimension of a composer's aspect is his work. With triumph you always have people shouting. You have people singing triumphal songs. Our party won and everyone cheers in the arena.

Music comes within the horizon of soundscapes which are provoked by a form. This is what Paik thought about when exposing music. He started with a series on exposing music. Of course he related to historical fact that the artist in residence at the time showed singing persons, so they exposed music, or that every musician is exposed to the notation of the music. So first of all music is to be exposed before it can start being heard.

When Schoenberg tried to think it through, how could I expose music to the musician? He developed the system of painting portraits. It was a kind of ideological preformed idea. All were portraits from behind because the public seeing a conductor is seeing the musician as a conductor from behind, so Schoenberg started about thirty-seven portraits of himself from behind. There were others from the front, but with his eyes raised up into a sphere, which could only be heard and not seen.

Again, criticism of evidence of the eye by the ear and criticism of the ear by the eye; so to be exposed is one thing, but an exposition is a logical structure of things exposed to the viewer.

This brings us to the sixth aspect of modernity within the work of Paik. If you really want to enable someone to give animating power to a piece of work, let us say a painting or a piece of music. If you want someone to be impressed, you

have to get the reaction of the person confronted with the music, with the painting. The painting itself as a notation is dead material. The painting is nothing but canvas with dust on it, or paint on it. It then becomes alive by confronting someone and having him react with enthusiasm similar to the Director's this morning, or with anger, or aggression. In this way the animation of dead materials is possible.
During the Renaissance, and we discussed this very often with Paik, artists were called zografos, like graphic or designing, so it is a living unit. It means bringing to life. The only creature within our reach, which was capable of giving life was woman by giving birth. Giving birth was the idea of creating life. Men then said how could we compete with woman as life giving units? So they invented the idea of zografos. It means someone who is able to animate dead material, otherwise known as his sculpture or his painting. This was a triumph. In our days, the Paik days, the late 50s, 60s, 70s, we all were completely aware that it does not make any sense to paint and to compose without having an audience which is educated enough to understand what is going on.

Every musician and artist has to educate his public because there is no reason to compose or paint without a public. Therefore, the idea of the professionalization of the audience, consumers, voters, and patients began.

We installed this kind of diploma studies for voters, viewers, and listeners of a work of art or concert – for consumers and for patients. Nowadays in America if you are not a professionalized patient you have no chance to come out healthy from the health system. You have to be a professionalized patient capable of exposing yourself to the doctors and assistants to survive.

So we made available centers for the professionalization of audiences. Nearly everybody asked: how can I reach my ultimate goal to have a partner in the audience to whom all this work is dedicated? Because without the public I cannot define what I do.

So professionalization of the patients, viewers, listeners, even the passerbys, and, of course, the voters was quite substantial.

This is the exact same attitude of a Zen master towards his pupils in the Chinese or Korean sense – as the artist towards his audience, the public. For instance, a master gave his best to his pupil, but the pupil said to his master, “Master, I think you taught me everything you know but it is not enough. I will go to the West. I will go to Western universities, and I will learn to be a good Christian. Then afterwards you can define the difference between now and then.” After ten years he came back and said, “Oh master! Here I am!” and the master asked, “What did you learn?” and he replied, “Oh, I learned a lot. For instance, I am capable now of walking on water.” The master said, “You stupid idiot. This is something we can do by boat.” It is exactly the effect of education by enlightenment, and it can only be of use if it is tempered by disappointment – enlightenment by disappointment.

Exactly the Buddhist technique. Exactly the techniques of modern pedagogy. Exactly what you have to learn as a student to become a scientist or an artist. And Paik was perfect. So all his actions were on this level of the highest ranking measures to educate the audience and the public.

I have about fifty of these topics, and it is good to have heard my talk, but it is better to just ask for the many DVDs and papers we have. We have thousands and thousands and we may offer them for free. There you may get some success in educating yourself. Being the master and the pupil in one person. Because in Germany, for instance, the definition of a high-ranking professor is the student who is best poised to learn. You have to educate yourself to continuously start again as a student. This way you have the best chance of developing yourself by being your own partner. Being the generalized other to yourself as was said yesterday by the speaker quoting Levinas.

To educate yourself means to adopt a patient, optimistic attitude. By having undergone every possible aggressive confrontation with challenges, with fears, with dangers, with political systems, with wars where people are practicing this kind of stupidity.

You have to fight wars only to avoid failure, and, of course, this is the last

insight for every avant-gardist, every artist, and every scientist. Convincing someone, for instance, art students, that they should not go on just wanting to become artists but that they should want to become an intelligent, understandable audience in order to be partners to nearly everybody, you need the other side. The public is the moving element with democratic developments, the moving part of democratic societies, and, of course, the practices within these systems by artists and scientists.

I tell you, I only met three people like Paik able to understand these problems without any effort whatsoever. One of them you might know, Joseph Beuys. The other is Paik, of course. The third is Fritz Schwegler. Being this in tune and able to react to any aspect just mentioned was a very delicate and special ability of Paik's. Ask your director or the curator to build a show of Schwegler's monuments. So, these were just a few guidelines for your confrontation of Paik. You do not need him to guide you, you can guide yourselves, and I hope this has been helpful for thinking of how to reach this aim. Thank you.