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Improvisation, In-determinism, Echos, Feedback, and Empty Space: Nam June Paik's *Groove*

Improvizacija, indeterminizam, jeka, povratna informacija i prazan prostor – Nam June Paikov *Groove*

Sažetak

Prihvaćajući radikalni zaokret od svoje početne težnje da bude avangardni skladatelj, Nam June Paik uključio je različite medije u svoju umjetnost. Njegove revolucionarne videoeksperimente, Fluxus, pa čak i satelitsku i lasersku umjetnost karakterizira pet ključnih elemenata: improvizacija, indeterminizam, jeka, povratna informacija i prazan prostor.

Improvizacija

Kad su ga u intervjuu 1974. godine pitali o značaju Fluxusa, Paik je odgovorio: „To je moja mladost. Moja nevinost. Imao sam dosta nevine, dosta ‘mladenačke’ ideale. Trudio se biti što je moguće neviniji“. Kao mladi umjetnik, Paik je priređivao čiste hepeninge i ekstremne performanse koje je kombinirao s improvizacijom.

Indeterminizam

Paik zapravo nikad nije napustio Fluxus. Godine 1980. držao je daljinski upravljač kojim je pomicao violinu u rijeci. MS-FLUXUSSUS (Simfonija br. 7) simbolizirao je otpor struji. Koncept indeterminizma, kako ga je definirao John Cage, odigrao je ključnu ulogu, naglašavajući uklanjanje značenja iz zvuka, otkrivajući stvarnost zvuka lišenog psihološke iluzije.

Povratna informacija

Paik je povratnu informaciju vidio ne samo kao elektronički fenomen, već i kao bitan izraz umjetnosti. Povezao je nostalgiju s povratnom informacijom, opisujući je kao „slatko-kiseli, homeopatski krug povratnih informacija“. Sjećanja i nostalgija utječu na odluke u sadašnjosti, stvarajući povratne informacije u našim životima. Video, jedan od učinkovitih medija za očuvanje prošlosti, postaje alat za generiranje povratnih informacija i nostalgije.

Prazan prostor i jeka

Paik je istraživao značenje praznog prostora i jeke, što je posebno vidljivo u djelu Good Morning, Mr. Orwell. Space Yodel Mercea Cunninghama i sviranje na kaktusima Johna Cagea pokazali su međuigru prostora, jeke i povratne informacije. Paikova fascinacija satelitskom tehnologijom otkrila je potencijal za umjetničko stvaranje, gdje se slike ponavljaju poput jeke zbog kašnjenja satelitskog signala, naglašavajući važnost praznog prostora.

Improvizacija, indeterminizam, jeka, povratna informacija i prazan prostor; ove ključne riječi zapravo su pet elemenata za koje je Paik 1984. ustvrdio da su ključni za satelitske umjetnike. Satelitska umjetnost, prema Paiku, nadilazi prijenos postojećih djela; mora uzeti u obzir fizičke uvjete, stvoriti strukturu razgovora, svladati vremenske razlike i prihvatiti elemente poput improvizacije i indeterminizma. U društvu naviknutom na instant komunikaciju, u svijetu u kojem se poruke brzo razmjenjuju, Paikovi uvidi ostaju relevantni. Da bismo postigli istinsku komunikaciju, moramo biti otvoreni za improvizaciju, indeterminizam, pokazati iskrenost prema povratnim informacijama, prihvatiti prazan prostor i naučiti slušati odjek nakon komunikacije. Ti su elementi, tvrdi Paik, ključni za istinsku komunikaciju u sadašnjosti, nasuprot plitkoj komunikaciji vođenoj opsesivnom usredotočenosti na budućnost.

Paik was born in 1932 in Korea, and was raised learning piano and composition early in his childhood. Under the strong influence of his music teachers, he wanted to be an extreme avant-garde composer like Arnold Schönberg. However, he took a dramatic turn by incorporating different kinds of media in his music, carrying out new and exciting experiments which were open to video art. These experiments developed via Fluxus to include video, and even satellites and lasers. Here are five key words selected that reflect Paik's journey, which was full of interesting experiments: Improvisation, In-determinism, Echos, Feedback, and Empty Space.

Improvisation

When asked in a 1974 interview what the significance of Fluxus was, Paik replied, "It's my youth. My purity. I had very pure, very 'young man' ideals. It was about being as pure as possible" (Decker-Phillips 1993). As a Young artist, Paik carried out pure happenings and extreme performances at the same time, in the midst of improvisation. It was hard to foresee what Paik would show in his Fluxus concerts. When George Maciunas, the master figure of Fluxus, passed away in 1978, Joseph Beuys and Paik staged *In Memoriam George Maciunas* at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf. Paik and Beuys agreed to carry out their performances for 74 minutes, a number that is the reverse of two digits 47, the age of

Maciunas. They decided to proceed with their own performances individually without any further agreement on any other detail. Paik brushed a microphone against the piano keys or tapped it on the keys in the middle of playing Korean songs and atonal pieces of music. After the concert, Paik produced *Urmusik*, and put it in a memorial box.

In-determinism

Paik never really left Fluxus. In 1980, Paik was standing by the river in Düsseldorf, holding a remote control to move a violin down the river. Can a small propeller beneath a violin resist the current of the river? Subtitled “Symphony No. 7,” *MS-FLUXUSSUS* turns waves, the wind that causes waves, and even surrounding sounds, into parts of a symphony alongside the violin. The idea of in-determinacy, as defined by John Cage, explains this symphony very well. When meaning is removed from sound, in other words when the harmony is removed, “psychological illusion” disappears, and the reality of the sound appears. In this, we face real sound full of in-determinism instead of illusion.

Feedback

Paik considered that feedback is an electronic phenomenon and, at the same time, that it expresses the essence of art. To understand this, we need to look back at Paik’s remark that feedback has certain affinities with our historical consciousness or nostalgia. Paik said, “Electronically speaking, Nostalgia is nothing but a sweet-sour, homeopathic feedback circuit using delay line of decades” (Paik and Rosebush 1974). Remembering the past, or nostalgia, influences our attitudes and decisions in the present. This is the feedback in our lives. Video is one of the effective media for preserving the past. *Nam June Paik – In the Groove* begins with Paik’s interview video in Zagreb. Facing this interview, we became parts of the feedback along with nostalgia.

Empty Space and Echos

The highlight of *Good Morning, Mr. Orwell* is Merce Cunningham’s “space yodel.” Cunningham’s restrained movements produce an echo, followed by John Cage’s performance of playing cacti. Cage’s music continues in different scenes as well, together with different sounds and Salvador Dali’s video is on view behind Cunningham. Dali explains how an audiovisual image is divided into multiple images because of a specific difference in the phase of a work of art, and his

explanation helps to understand the visual effect of Space Yodel. Cunningham expressed the effect of “space feedback” in which Paik saw the possibility of artistic creation through using satellite technology along with dance. It refers to the effect of images that are repeated over and over like an echo due to a one-second lag produced when transmitting signals to different locations via satellite. Echo is a reflection of sound that arrives to the listener with a delay after the direct sound. Thus, empty space between the two parties is essential. Echos remind us that we are physically apart, however they also connect us via sound waves. We all know that Paik’s video experiments became echos and air all around the world. Paik’s video is a new way of communication which crosses cultures and languages and became echoes in the air from Korea to Zagreb.

Improvisation, In-determinism, Echos, Feedback, and Empty Space; these keywords are, in fact, five elements that Nam June Paik said that satellite artists should consider in 1984.

“The satellite artist must compose his art from the beginning suitable to physical conditions and grammar. Satellite art in the superior sense does not merely transmit existing symphonies and operas to other lands. It must consider how to achieve two-way connection between opposites of the earth; how to give a conversational structure to the art; how to master differences in time; how to play with improvisation, in-determinism, echos, feedbacks, and empty spaces in the cagean sense... Satellite art must make the most of these elements (for they can become strengths or weaknesses) creating a multitemporal, multispatial symphony” (Hanhardt, Zinman and Decker-Phillip 2019).

Our way of communicating takes place over a very short period of time. We are accustomed to direct messages that we send and we receive a response instantly, without waiting. How can true communication take place for us, who have lost the time to send messages, the time to imagine, to wait? As Paik said, we must be open to improvisation, to be in-deterministic, show sincerity to feedback, to accept the empty space between the other person and ourselves, and learn to listen to the echos after communication. These five elements are essential for us, for those who crave true communication that takes place in the present, and not the shallow communication of the obsessive future.

Works cited

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