

**Press  
 Release**

Title	<b>Nam June Paik's 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Exhibition</b> <b><i>THE CONSULTANT: PAIK'S PAPERS 1968-1979</i></b>	
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**Nam June Paik's 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Exhibition**  
***THE CONSULTANT: PAIK'S PAPERS 1968-1979***



Photo © Gianni Melotti

- *The Consultant: Paik's Papers 1968-1979* sheds light on the policymaker Nam June Paik taking his ideas captured in the reports written by the artist as a starting point.
- The exhibition urges the viewer to see Paik in a new light, while showing how the realization of his artistic vision was underpinned not only by institutional support from the government, but also by collaboration with and support from private foundations, patronage funds, public schools, laboratories, broadcasters and art institutions.
- Taking a look at Paik, as an agent of change both in social infrastructure and technology and as a media consultant in the 1960s during the social transition period. Paik's media consulting is still ongoing in the midst of another war and social change.

## ■ Overview

- Title: *THE CONSULTANT: PAIK'S PAPERS 1968-1979*
- Period: October 13, 2022 – March 26, 2023
- Venue: Nam June Paik Art Center, Gallery 1
- Curator: Kim Yoonseo (Curator, Nam June Paik Art Center)
- Artist: Nam June Paik
- Hosted and Organized by Nam June Paik Art Center, Gyeonggi Cultural Foundation
- Sponsored by Dunamu, Korea Mecenat Accociation, Art Council Korea
- Supported by LOTTE Chilsung, Noroo Paint

## ■ Introduction

Nam June Paik left behind various documents in different languages, including letters, scores, essays, proposals, and reports. One of these, a 1974 report somewhat grandly titled “MEDIA PLANNING FOR THE POST INDUSTRIAL AGE: Only 26 years left until the 21st Century,” seems more like a policy research document than an artist’s note. Instead of simply sharing bold ambitions, the report contains detailed and concrete plans for implementation. The text shares a vision akin to what has been realized today with the internet, stressing the urgency of being able to transmit ideas in real time through “electronic super highway,” just as the building of highways in the 1930s had enabled the movement of goods and the achievement of an economic revival. Emphasizing that “Mind pollution is as bad as air pollution,” Paik also urges caution in ensuring that media communications are not monopolized by technology experts or some “mysterious power complex.”

Paik actually did carry the title of “consultant.” While he was based in New York, he carried out his work with Rockefeller Foundation Art Grants in “Television/Video/Film” and for a roughly 20-year period beginning in the mid-1960s, he served in official and unofficial advisory roles, playing a leading part in emphasizing the importance of supporting medial field and proposing directions for its development. During this time, his video art and the video community were broadcast on television channels, discussed in scholarly contexts, and exhibited, collected, and proliferated by art institutions. His proposal expressed his bold ambitions of solving social problems through the medium of art, with immediate implementation plans laid out in considerable detail: digitalization to record and preserve human cultural history, video exchanges as a tool for learning and resolving our lack of understanding toward different cultures, the creation of electronic superhighways as communication systems connecting the world, and the continued pursuit of diverse representation in public broadcasting content.

As its title suggests, *The Consultant: Paik’s Papers 1968 - 1979*, a special exhibition commemorating the 90th anniversary of Paik’s birth, takes the artist’s reports as its starting point. Rather than emphasizing his individual achievements and the aesthetic context for his video art, it considers Paik as a policymaker based on three reports that he wrote in English between 1968 and 1979: “EXPANDED EDUCATION FOR THE PAPERLESS SOCIETY” (1968), “MEDIA PLANNING FOR THE POST INDUSTRIAL AGE” (1974), and “HOW TO KEEP EXPERIMENTAL VIDEO ON PBS NATIONAL PROGRAMMING” (1979). Compared with his achievements focusing for a lifetime on the medium of video art, relatively little is known of how Paik investigated the *raison d’être* for social infrastructure and art and suggested new avenues for them. As it examines his work through the lens of Paik’s papers, the exhibition urges the viewer to see Paik in a new light, while showing how the realization of his artistic vision was underpinned not only by institutional support from the government, but also by collaboration with and support from private foundations, patronage funds, public schools, laboratories, broadcasters and art institutions.

The exhibition's aims lie in taking a detour from the historic highway of regarding Paik as the "father of video art" and seeing him in a different light on a different sort of path—leaving behind the crossroads of preexisting knowledge and experience to find new opportunities for liberation. Exploring Nam June Paik as an analyst, a media consultant, and an agent of change for social infrastructure and technology during the social transitional period of the 1960s is a way of uncovering new tasks that have heretofore received little attention in studies of the artist, while also creating new points of contact with his works of electronic art. As we stand amid a different kind of digital shift and social change today, Paik's media consulting is a work that is still in progress.

## ■ Sections

### 1. Instant Global University

"Suppose a girl in Kentucky wants to study the Japanese Koto instrument, and a graduate at U.C.L.A. wants to experiment with certain Persian or Afghanistan musical instruments. How would they do this? The mailable television (i.e. videotape) would enable the individual lessons for many subjects to be given from anywhere to anywhere. For instance, twenty different music students of an American university could study twenty instruments of a Gagaku orchestra, which exists only in the Japanese emperor's court, using videotape, and then go on a concert tour to Japan dressed in authentic costumes. This would be a major Cultural shock to the Japanese, comparable to that of Admiral Perry. This technique applies in less spectacular, but more substantial fields."

Nam June Paik, "EXPANDED EDUCATION FOR THE PAPERLESS SOCIETY," 1968

In a 1968 paper titled "EXPANDED EDUCATION FOR THE PAPERLESS SOCIETY," Nam June Paik proposed the concept of an "Instant Global University," the mailable television as a way of recording and sharing videotapes from anywhere to anywhere. The video is a tool for learning and addressing the problem of lack of understanding toward other cultures. Around the same time that he wrote it, Paik was experimenting with computers as a visiting artist at Bell Labs, which was regarded as one of the most innovative scientific institutions in the world. He was also working as a communications research consultant at Stony Brook University. Traveling back and forth among his own studio, the university, and the laboratory, Paik would meet with students and engineers, making use of expensive equipment and laboratory computer facilities that were not yet available to the public. The experiences that he gained interacting with people in different fields and making use of the university and laboratory's physical and intellectual resources would be reflected later in his paper's concrete ideas. They would also come to underpin his perspective of viewing art and other forms of social infrastructure as public goods.



### Hacker Newbie, 1994

Long before the internet was commercialized, Nam June Paik anticipated it with his proclamation of an “electronic super highway” concept in his 1974 report “MEDIA PLANNING FOR THE POST INDUSTRIAL AGE.” He also brought this into being through a large-scale US touring exhibition titled *The Electronic Super Highway: Travels with Nam June Paik* (1994-1997). *Hacker Newbie*, a key work in that exhibition, represents the next generation traveling along the electronic superhighway. The word “newbie” in the title was a piece of online-derived slang referring to a newcomer or someone who was only just starting to use the internet. “Hacking” is a term that refers to all actions that alter source code in ways not intended by the programmer, while a “hacker” is someone who discovers new paths. Paik’s hopes can be seen in both the title and the work itself, which uses the image of a child robot sculpture to visualize the future generation already poised to begin its journey of life on the electronic superhighway.



### Highway Hacker, 1994

*Highway Hacker* is a TV-robot with a face where the eyes and mouth consist of yellow traffic signal objects and an upside-down antique radio case; into these, television monitors have been placed. A sense of identity is added with the placement of a computer and circuit board on the crown of the head, while a horn placed around the mouth visualizes the horn sounds encountered on the highway. The

videos that play in the eyes and mouth juxtapose different means of transportation (roads, ships, vehicles, and so forth) with virtual expressway images created by computer, metaphorically alluding to the aspects of social transformation that Paik focused on during the 1970s—namely, the transition from a hardware-centered industrial society to a software-based information society. While this TV sculpture is seen as capturing the image of human beings in a future society, *Highway Hacker* may also be Paik's own self-portrait.

## 2. Electronic Super Highway

“Above all, the greatest of the three main transport revolutions since the 1770's is now speeding towards us. It will clearly replace the internal combustion engine revolution as dramatically as that revolution replaced steam, and it happens to be extraordinarily energy-saving. This great new transport revolution is telecommunications. As there is no logical reason why the cost of telecommunication should vary with distance, quite a lot of people by the late 1980's will telecommute daily to their London offices while living on a Pacific island if they want to; and temporary price rises for oil-driven travel in the early 1970's will now bring a few of these habits forward.”

Nam June Paik, “MEDIA PLANNING FOR THE POST INDUSTRIAL AGE,” 1974

The “electronic super highway” concept that Nam June Paik espoused in his 1974 report “Media Planning for the Post Industrial Age” had its origins in actual highways. His message stressing the urgent need for people to build an electronic superhighway to transmit and share ideas in real time—just as the highways built in the US during the 1930s had enabled the transportation of goods and an economic revival—is based on the parallels between electronic communications and road transportation as a form of social infrastructure. Paik was a voracious reader who consumed the latest research in every area during this time of social change—reading books, policy reports, articles, and more by anthropologists, sociologists, economists, and futurologists. Yet Paik's vision was different, in that he sought not to follow the main network of the capitalist market economy, but rather to detour the fringe of the system with his video art. Paik envisioned a global village where different actors could come together across boundaries of region, ethnicity, gender, and generation, while warning of the need to take care and ensure that this would not be monopolized by technology experts or any “mysterious power complex.”



*Robot on Sedan Chair & Robot on Motorcycle, 1995*

Nam June Paik's work often included means of transportation such as carts, palanquins, bicycles, motorcycles, and cars. This was a reflection of the history of advancements in transformation—which Paik described as a “revolution”—and his research explorations of telecommunication as a new means of transportation, an “electronic super highway.” In *Robot on Sedan Chair & Robot on Motorcycle*, the work itself directly refers to the past and present, as the title indicates. The neon lights of the motorcycle-riding robot represent a heightened form of the speed and exhilaration we sense riding on the electronic superhighway today. By pairing it with a robot on sedan chair, the work concisely shows Paik's aim of presenting a future perspective while also meditating on older media. Commissioned by LOTTE Chilsung Beverage in 1995 for the 50th anniversary of Korea's liberation, *Robot on Sedan Chair & Robot on Motorcycle* was actually used in an advertisement at the time for the company's beverage “Chilsung Cider.” It was a groundbreaking commercial that presented Paik's video art for a 32-second spot, resulting in his work being broadcast to televisions in households across Korea by means of a TV advertisement. Among all the different subjects that the artist touched upon, this work used the popular medium of television as a creative tool, in a way that related to the philosophy he expressed when he stressed that “art is not private property.”



***Elephant Cart, 2001***

*Elephant Cart* is composed of a wooden elephant, a Buddha sculpture, and a red cart filled with stacks of TV sets, radios, gramophone speakers, and more. Each of the elephant's four legs is placed on a four-wheeled dolly, and the Buddha sitting in a plastic chair is holding an Adidas white-and-yellow umbrella. The elephant is tethered with red electric cords to the cart, and the antique television monitor at the rear end shows a video of the Surin Elephant Round-up. The cart filled with TV sets and radios appears to show diffusing information that is headed in the direction of the elephant's movement. Combined with objects of the past and new media, *Elephant Cart* allows one not only to look back on the past but also to reconsider how communication is working today in this age of speed when everything is rapidly changing.

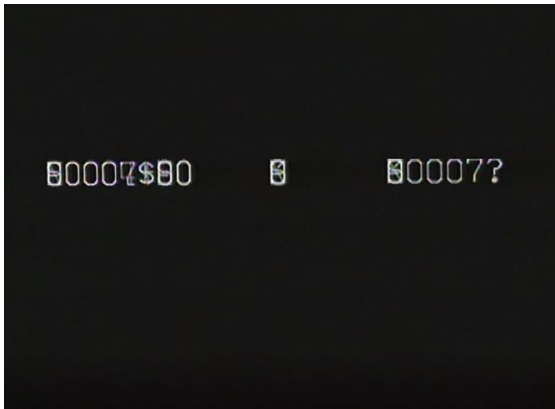
### 3. Laboratory, Network, Museum

“Video artists have been the pioneers. We are the first social group who made an INTERNATIONAL video network through museums, colleges, community centers and libraries for alternative distribution and critical re-evaluation.”

Nam June Paik, “HOW TO KEEP EXPERIMENTAL VIDEO ON PBS NATIONAL PROGRAMMING,” 1979

With the enactment of the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 on the heels of the National Arts and Cultural Development Act of 1964, television was defined as a tool for bringing art to the US public,

and related support was substantially increased. Beyond this institutional context of the public sector legislating roles for public broadcasting in the use of media for educational and cultural purposes and the provision of resources linked to communities, public broadcasters also received support from institutions such as the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations. Around this period, Nam June Paik's video art and the video community were being broadcast on television channels and discussed in academic contexts, which served as a basis for their exhibition, collection, and dissemination by art institutions. Against this backdrop, Paik was able to produce and air experimental television programs, alternating between art institutions, universities, laboratories, and networks as he made use of computers and broadcasting equipment that would have been difficult for members of the public to access. Through this, he was ultimately able to achieve his vision of communication between continents and different cultures, using the satellite broadcasting systems that represented the crystallization of state-directed high technology. Undergirding all of this were many different factors: the institutional context, the support funds, the collaborations with networks of artists, the open social infrastructure, and the learning process. The experiences he learned through the infrastructure commons eventually led to the establishment of a public art museum.



*Digital Experiment at Bell Labs, 1966-67*

Bell Telephone Laboratories, which was seen as one of the most innovative science institutions in the world, invited artists to make use of its computer equipment for a period in the 1960s. Alongside its physical resources, the lab also provided human and intellectual resources, which not only allowed artists to understand the technology and to apply it to their own artistic paths in new ways but also brought about interactions in which its own engineers were able to connect and share their ideas with artists. *Digital Experiment at Bell Labs* is one of the computer experiments that Nam June Paik carried out while working as a visiting artist at Bell Labs between 1966 and 1968. Created in the early programming language Fortran on an analog GE-600 computer, the silent black-and-white video lasts for four minutes and shows a computer screen. The video consists of seemingly meaningless numbers and dots that represent a form of visual play while also alluding to Paik's artistic approach to the computer.



*Global Groove*, 1973

*Global Groove* was produced in collaboration with the Boston WGBH and New York WNET. The initial form of this video was a television program aired by WNET-TV on January 30, 1974. In collaboration with the institution of broadcasting television, Paik used the television networks as distribution channels for his video works. For the television stations, the collaboration provided an opportunity to have the initiative of the potential new media as a creative medium; for video artists, to search for an alternative space for working and exhibiting. It consists of dazzling sequences of music and dance from different parts of the world, representing diverse types of art and culture, born out of Paik's typical style of editing which uses the *Paik-Abe Video Synthesizer* to modulate shape and color and mixes different images. *Global Groove* shows the global vision, made possible with the global communication of culture through nonverbal communication methods of music and dance.



*Good Morning Mr. Orwell*, 1984

In opposition to the predictions of George Orwell's *1984*, which showed a totalitarian society where Big Brother uses television to centralize knowledge and authority, Paik conducted a live broadcast of his satellite project *Good Morning Mr. Orwell* all over the world as he connected New York and Paris in real time. This was edited in a way that transposed or juxtaposed the performances of avant-garde artists such as John Cage, Merce Cunningham and Charlotte Moorman in New York and Joseph Beuys and Urban Sax at the Pompidou Center in a single frame. The satellite of the 1980s was the product of the Cold War and an achievement in high technology based on the investment of exorbitant amounts of national capital. As a result, this technology was only accessible to a few major broadcasters and NASA. However, Paik thought of these satellite broadcast systems as an opportunity to bridge different continents and cultures, thereby realizing a true art commons where people could globally communicate through arts and culture.





***My Faust–Autobiography, 1989-1991***

*My Faust* offers an excellent illustration of Paik’s perspective on key elements of social change and the social role of the artist. It is a large-scale work in 13 parts, with subtitles reflecting 13 themes such as “art,” “education,” “agriculture,” “health,” “transportation,” and “communications.” His choice of subtitles seems to reflect the influence of Daniel Bell’s diagrams of the major elements in periods of social change, which were a focus of Paik’s attention in 1974. Integrating the themes outlined above, *My Faust–Autobiography* is a representative work encompassing the different concepts that Paik focused on as a policymaker. Twenty-five television sets are installed in a structure that draws on the form of a Western Gothic church or altar, while at the very top another monitor and antennae rise up toward the heavens. On the structure’s surface is a collage of laserdiscs, newspaper articles, letters, musical scores, and more; in the pocket of Paik’s own coat hanging idly to one side is one of the newspapers that he constantly carried around. *Faust* is a reference to a play that Goethe spent six decades writing and completed through a lifetime’s worth of reflecting. With the title *My Faust*, Paik expresses what he sought to achieve through a lifelong career as an artist.

## ■ New Acquisition 2022



### ***Gulliver*, 2001**

*Gulliver* is a three-channel video installation produced by Paik in 2001. Its motif comes from *Gulliver's Travels*, a 1726 book by Jonathan Swift. While it is widely known for its episodes as the title character Lemuel Gulliver visits the lands of tiny people (Lilliput) and giants and the flying island of Laputa, it is actually a work of scathing satire and criticism of human society.

Lying on the ground, the giant *Gulliver* is a massive robot stretching for over four meters in length. His body consists of a total of 11 old TV and radio cases and similar items, while two videos are shown on 11 cathode-ray televisions. One shows a cyborg striding over a high-tech media environment, along with images of self-driving and electronic highway travel rendered in computer graphics. The other alternately shows *Robot K-456*, landscapes from around the world, and computer graphics. As its videos show the different aspects of the present and future, Paik's *Gulliver* captures the stories and imaginings of different societies.

Perhaps the most eye-catching elements are the 18 Lilliputian robots. The tiny robots call to mind the "Lilliput" toys produced in Japan during the 1930s, which are regarded as the first mass-produced robots. The tiny robots that Paik has created with his *Gulliver* take on different forms. Their bodies are variously composed of machinery parts, screws, wires, and pipes, while their heads are made from five-inch LCD televisions. The videos showing in the robots' heads are produced with colorful, gaudy computer graphics, showing a performance by Paik's *Robot K-456* as it walks down a New York street; toy robots being operated; and a performance by Charlotte Moorman that has been manipulated with a video synthesizer. In the process, Paik shows not only the contrast between the lively tiny robots and the relatively languid, supine giant *Gulliver*, but also an amusing glimpse at the theatrical situation that unfolds as the robots climb up and down ladders tying *Gulliver* down with wires.

■ **Information**

- Free Admission
- Opening Hours: 10am-6pm
- Last entry one hour before closing
- Closed on Mondays (excluding holidays), Lunar New Year's Day

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