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Chapter 15

A Poor Man from a Poor Country

Nam June Paik,
TV-Buddha, and the
Techno-Orientalist Lens

CHARLES PARK

When Nam June Paik passed away in his Miami Beach winter house in early 2006, numerous galleries, museums, and art organizations throughout the globe memorialized him with tributes worthy of someone of his stature. His obituary in the *New York Times* (January 31, 2006) celebrated him as the inventor of video art, and the *Times* of London (January 31, 2006) lauded him as “one of the very few artists who single-handedly changed the course and tone of art in the 20th century.” As the first artist to experiment with and use video as a legitimate medium, Paik was influential in altering the relationship between art and electrical engineering. Paik’s collaboration with the Japanese engineer Shuya Abe, for instance, resulted in the Paik-Abe video synthesizer as well as the incorporation of robotics into art with *Robot K-456*. At the vanguard of the use of video and televisual technologies as an artistic medium, Paik was always conscious of technological development and its impact on postindustrial societies; Paik predicted the development of satellite and cable TV and, in 1974, coined the term “electronic superhighway.”

The global scale of his memorials attests to the fact that Paik was a global artist. His works were accessible to a general international audience, and a few were actually transnational in scale. In fact, his interests in televisual technologies naturally led Paik to utilize telecommunication technology to reach a wide audience. His works *Good Morning, Mr. Orwell* (1984) and *Bye Bye Kipling* (1986) were simulcast—although not without their technical difficulties—over several cities on different continents. Paik’s sculptural pieces, likewise, engage the audiences with their whimsy, as well as quickly flashing, colorful images that are familiar to anyone now in the post-MTV era. With these techniques, Paik’s art speaks a language that is easily understandable and relatable for audiences in the developed world whose lives are surrounded by quickly shifting technological advances that make communications easier, compress distances, and make certain images recognizable across cultures.

Paik is also global in a sense that he is a figure who is cosmopolitan with homes in many different places. He could effectively call New York and Düsseldorf home, and his upbringing in Korea and education in Japan and Munich also influenced the trajectory of his career. Thus his *Bye Bye Kipling* directly addresses Rudyard Kipling’s “The Ballad of East and West,” which begins “Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.” It is worth noting that the quatrain that begins and ends the poem reads in full,

Oh, East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God’s great Judgment Seat;
But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,
When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from the ends of
the earth!

In this sense, it is ironic that Paik chooses to bid farewell to Kipling since Paik himself represents the two sides of the border facing each other. Thus Paik traverses the seeming differences between the “East” and the “West.” Yet he also used his status as an Asian in the Western European/American art world to his advantage, providing his work with an “Asian sensibility” that was different from the works of other artists in the postwar avant-garde Fluxus movement, of which he was a member.

The fact that Paik is of Korean descent made him susceptible to this categorization as an “Asian” artist even as his mentor, John Cage, who was heavily influenced by Zen Buddhism, was not. Whereas for Cage his Buddhist sensibility is learned after studying under various monks and teachers, Paik’s is deemed to be a part of his genetic code so that everything he does is “naturally” Buddhist in nature. Paik’s “Asianness” made his art equally Asian to his Western colleagues and audiences. Indeed critics often talk about Paik as an artist who is bridging the “gap” between “the East” and “the West.” Paik certainly

realized the commercial implications of this role and did not shy away from it, as the titles of some of his works (*Bye Bye Kipling*, for instance) suggest. Rather, throughout his career he has repeatedly said of himself, “I am a poor man from a poor country, therefore I have to be entertaining all the time” (qtd. in Hanzal). Carla Hanzal sees this as an ironic self-parody and a strategy “to engage the audience and to traverse cultural boundaries.” While I agree with this assessment, the self-designation as a “poor man from a poor country” underscores his awareness of his precarious position as an Asian-born artist in a Western art world that too often excludes non-Western artists. Furthermore, Paik’s desire to be “entertaining” often led him to present his art as standing on both sides of the border between East and West. Consequently, his work in general—and, as I will argue, his *TV-Buddha*, in particular—has often been viewed as culturally paradoxical and even antithetical.¹ My argument is that this is a gross misreading that desires an essentialized “East” and “West” in Paik’s work. Instead, one must read Paik’s art as demonstrating the fluidity with which cultural and technological exchanges occur, and just how quickly these exchanges can be absorbed to generate hybrid identities and cultures. In order to explicate these readings fully, however, a bit of context is necessary.

Through the course of the second half of the twentieth century, Japan became synonymous with technological advancements, manifesting in the West in the form of consumer electronics and automotive manufacturing. The development of the transistor, coinciding with the end of World War II and the start of an economic boom in the United States, allowed Japanese corporate conglomerations to turn the Japanese economy toward the development of consumer goods for sale in the United States and Western Europe. Within a generation, Japan transformed itself from military/colonial power to a manufacturing/economic power, with a focus on gaining market shares in the booming American consumer market of the 1950s and 1960s. It was also at this time that Nam June Paik came into his own as an artist and gained international acclaim for his use of consumer electronic technology in his works.

Paik was born to an affluent family in Seoul, Korea, in 1932 during the Japanese occupation. His family left Korea in 1949, a year before the Korean War started, eventually settling in Japan by way of Hong Kong; Paik later graduated from the University of Tokyo in 1956 with a degree in aesthetics and music history and a thesis on the modernist composer Arnold Schoenberg. Realizing that in order to study modern composition he needed to be in Europe, Paik moved to Germany to study at the University of Munich and the Academy of Music in Freiberg. In the early 1960s, he became involved with the Fluxus movement, performing at various “happenings” throughout Germany. Paik eventually began utilizing used TV sets as art objects, exhibiting them first in 1963 at the Exposition of Music-Electronic Television in Wuppertal, Germany. The fact that he became involved with Fluxus, which took its

cue from the Dadaists, is fortuitous since his musical composition skills were mediocre at best. Besides, his performance pieces, many of which called for violently attacking musical instruments, took Paik away from composition and moved him toward a form of expressionism. He eventually became the first video artist when he purchased Sony's first portable video camera at New York's Liberty Music Store in 1965. On the same day, he was delayed on his way home by Pope Paul VI's procession through the city, which Paik recorded with his new camera and screened that same night to an audience in a Greenwich Village cafe. Thus began video art.

In telling the story of the first video art piece, Patricia Mellencamp finds that "[t]he irony of Japanese consumer technology in the hands of a Korean in New York filming the Pope and triggering an art movement funded by the NEA and the Rockefeller Foundation is delightful indeed" (41). More than ironic, however, that video art began with the confluence of an Asian-born artist utilizing Japanese technology in the West has merely added credence to techno-Orientalist readings of Paik's work. As David Morley and Kevin Robins explain in their discussion of techno-Orientalism, Japan's technological rise since the 1960s has caused a sense of "cultural emasculation" in the West, and, as a result, "these postmodern technologies [became] structured in the discourse of Orientalism" (169). In this sense, Paik's use of cutting-edge technology since the late 1950s represents, on the one hand, a postmodern sensibility brought upon by these televisual technologies, while, on the other hand, it presents the avenue through which his works are "misread" from a techno-Orientalist perspective in a way that works by Bruce Nauman, Bill Viola, or Gary Hill are not.²

For the casual art patron, however, Paik's TV and video sculptures will be most familiar. Whether it be his large TV flags or the massive video walls or sculptures made from vintage TV sets, the viewer is drawn to the scale of the pieces and then to their accessibility. On one level, it seems clear that Paik is making a political or a social commentary about the state of modern societies through these pieces, even if they do not know exactly what that commentary is. This accessibility, not to mention his prolific production, makes his work perfect for public spaces, and his works can be seen in lobbies of corporate buildings, city squares, and sports venues throughout the world. Of all his work, however, arguably his most popular piece is *TV-Buddha*.

The fact that *TV-Buddha* has become so popular is itself almost ironic since this piece was an afterthought. This is a story that is now almost legendary for video art scholars: Paik needed to fill an empty wall at an exhibition at New York's Gallery Bonino in 1974. In order to do so, he set up a TV with a closed-circuit camera behind it and placed a statue of a monk (he apparently thought the statue, which he purchased as an investment, was that of a Buddha) opposite the TV so that the statue is facing its own image displayed on the screen. It

became one of Paik's more well-known pieces and has been remade in a number of different variations between 1974 and throughout the 1980s, incorporating different statues, different TV sets, and different overall configurations, while maintaining the same general concept.

And just as there are different versions of this piece, there are different critical assessments of what this piece means, none of which are entirely satisfactory. For instance, Jon Kessler writes in *Artforum* that some critics have considered *TV-Buddha* Paik's "interpretation of a Zen parable, but it also reveals his familiarity with Western media theory. So, while representing an unanswerable koan, it simultaneously comments on Marshall McLuhan's notion of a 'global village,' as well as [Guy Debord's] undoing of the self through accumulated representation. I think of TV Buddha [*sic*] as the first reality television show, portraying a self-affirming condition—"I exist because I'm on television"—happening in real time." Through this analysis, Kessler makes a distinction—by his use of the "but . . . also"—between "Zen" and "Western media theory" that makes it clear that these are distinctive and mutually exclusive philosophies and theories. Likewise, Edith Decker-Phillips, states, "The goal of [the Buddha's] meditation was absolute emptiness, beyond time and space, but the picture which appeared on the monitor returns him to his physicality which he cannot escape. Buddha, the symbol of Oriental wisdom, was thus forced to become a modern Narcissus" (75), thereby positing the totality of "Oriental wisdom" on the person of the Buddha.

Furthermore, Walter Smith believes that *TV-Buddha* should be viewed as Buddhist art. He feels that the current criticism sees this piece from a privileged Western perspective that wants to explain it from the tradition of Western art history and criticism. Smith, being a scholar of South Asian art, is familiar with Buddhist themes and motifs as well as iconography and is able to examine it from the vantage point of other Buddhist art, tracing its precedent through the story of Buddhas Gautama and Prabhutaratna, wherein just as Gautama was teaching his followers about the transcendental nature of the Buddha, Prabhutaratna, a Buddha from a previous world age who had been in enlightenment for hundreds of thousands of years, appeared to illustrate this point. Face to face, then, the two Buddhas discussed philosophy, much as Paik's TV-Buddha faces itself—one a present physicality and the other, through the delay in the camera-TV loop, an image of the past.

Of course, the fact that Paik made this piece quickly in fact could buttress the Buddhist motif of the piece. More specifically, the quickly made work of art, apparently without forethought or planning, is perfectly in line with Zen philosophy, which, taking its cue from Daoist aesthetics, stressed spontaneity. Zen (Ch'anin Chinese) monks during China's Sung Dynasty "composed poetry using a Taoist aesthetics that valued spontaneity and concrete visual imagery" (Robinson and Johnson 206). Once Zen Buddhism became popular

in Japan, the relationship between religious practice and aesthetics became even more entwined. According to Richard Robinson and Willard Johnson, Zen aesthetics stressed “total sincerity to one’s present activities, however minor, for the sake of one’s spiritual development” (243). This spontaneity and the emphasis on aesthetics are some of the reasons that Zen Buddhism appealed to the composer and Fluxus contributor John Cage as well as to Beat writers such as Gary Snyder, Jack Kerouac, and Allen Ginsberg, who preached “first thought, best thought.”

In addition, Zen Buddhism believes in the intuitive understanding of one’s buddhahood. Although originally it emphasized meditation as the central way to discover this inner self, later Zen Buddhism also allowed for spontaneous awakening without the rigors of meditation. Because Paik has often used “Zen” in the title of his works, such as *Zen for Walking* (1961), *Zen for TV* (1963), and *Zen for Film* (1964), and because of his relationship to Cage—a practicing Zen Buddhist, although not a meditating one—many art critics often wonder whether Paik himself was a Zen Buddhist. Performance pieces such as *Zen for Head* have only added to this question of Paik’s religious leanings. In this piece, performed at the Fluxus International Festival of New Music in 1962, Paik dipped his head in a bucket of black paint mixed with tomato juice and dragged it like a brush down a long roll of white paper. Depending on the critic, this piece references either the eighth-century master calligrapher Zhang Xu, the eighth-century painter Wang-hsia, and/or the Japanese artist Hokusai, all of whom are said to have painted with their heads on different occasions (Doris). Some critics have also pointed out that *Zen for Head* is also a performance of the avant-garde composer LaMonte Young’s *Composition 1960 #10*, which directed the performer to “[d]raw a straight line and follow it” (Rhee 48). Yet at the same time, Paik’s performance is also in line with the outrageously antiestablishment and performative nature of the Fluxus movement and of the works of abstract expressionist painter Franz Kline. (It is worth noting that some critics thought Kline borrowed heavily from Japanese calligraphy and brushwork, a claim that Kline denied throughout his career.) Despite the references to Buddhism, however, in an interview with Otto Hahn, who asked him whether he was a Buddhist, Paik responded in the negative, adding simply that he was an artist, thus adding to his complexity.

But the fact is that Paik does utilize Asian and Buddhist themes and motifs. Consequently, Paik’s frequent juxtaposition of Western and Asian images has also simply been attributed to his being Korean by critics and reviewers. Jieun Rhee, citing Abdul JanMohamed, argues that Paik is someone who exists in a “specular border.” According to JanMohamed, a “specular border intellectual [is] someone one who is ‘familiar with two cultures, [and] finds himself or herself unable or unwilling to be “at home” in these societies.’” Instead, these intellectuals “subject the cultures to ‘analytic scrutiny rather than combining

them” with the hopes of defining “utopian possibilities of group formation” (qtd. in Rhee 47). Rhee’s main contention is that Paik’s “Asian diasporal body” inhabits a liminal space of the specular border. Rhee sees Paik’s works, then, as producing “a hinge function showing how ideas and meanings are transformed when they cross ‘imaginary’ borders of East and West.” But despite the “imaginary” nature of the border, Rhee quickly argues that Paik’s negotiation of “both worlds . . . opens up the interface between East and West” (Rhee 50). Furthermore, Jacquelyn Serwer says in her critique of Paik’s cathedral-like sculpture *My Faust: Technology*, but also of his works in general, “Relationship between East and West, past and present, seriousness and whimsy show Paik maintaining his Zen-like equilibrium” (90). (Here she confuses Zen with Daoism, further underscoring the notion that Eastern philosophies are interchangeable and without identifiable distinctiveness for the Western critic.) Consequently, Paik not only becomes a conduit through which East and West interface but also acts as an equalizing force between the two.

Indeed, this expectation is not uncommon for artists who are of Asian descent working in the West. In her discussion of the Asian American artist Yun Gee, Elaine Kim explains how Gee was regarded as an “exotic novelty” by the European art community in the 1920s. Unable to be taken seriously as an artist in the United States, Gee went to Europe, where he received a warmer reception. Nonetheless, this reception was contingent upon his satisfying the Orientalist expectations of his European critics. In particular, according to Kim, Gee was expected to blend Eastern and the Western artistic sensibilities in his work (7). In other words, Gee was expected to incorporate “Asian” images or themes into his paintings rather than merely “copying” or reproducing Western themes or styles. This blending of the East and the West is an attribute that is seen as a given when the Western art/literary establishments formulate the artist and/or writer of Asian descent working in the West.

TV-Buddha is a popular piece precisely because it seemingly positions two incongruous cultures against each other. The Buddha, with its disavowal of materiality, sits opposite the video camera and its image on a TV screen—TV, of course, representing banality and the penultimate lowbrow culture. They seem at odds with each other, and this incongruity adds to the humor. This is perhaps the same reason why Paik’s *TV-Rodin*, in which Auguste Rodin’s *Thinker* replaces the Buddha, was not received with the same acclaim. Whereas the Buddha is perceived by Western audiences as ancient, static, something incongruous with the modern world, and representative of the Orient, Rodin’s *Thinker* is not seen to be as representative of Western or European culture. It does not stand in for an enlightened cosmopolitanism, particularly because the West sees itself as dynamic and heterogeneous. The West also sees itself as modern, which also inevitably means technologically advanced. Thus, when Rodin’s *Thinker* sits in front of a camera, contemplating its image on the TV

screen, it seems more redundant rather than whimsical or profound. The success of *TV-Buddha* lies in the significance that the Western audiences view the Buddha as a metonymy for the Orient as it sits vis-à-vis (a perceived Western) technology.

As an Asian artist working in the West, however, Paik recognizes that he can be a cultural curiosity, existing in a space that neither affords him the luxury of calling New York or Düsseldorf truly “home” while realizing that he was able to escape the tumultuous years of Korean history and receive an education because of his family’s affluence. For Paik, living in Japan, where ethnic Koreans are treated as inferior, then moving to Germany as an Asian avant-garde among white Europeans and Americans, his ethnicity and race definitely mattered. His distaste for Daisetz Teitoku “D. T.” Suzuki and what Paik once called Suzuki’s “selling of our culture” points not to Paik’s alliance with Suzuki as a fellow Asian, but to Suzuki’s marketing of a practice that further fueled the belief in an essentialized East Asia and the belief that Westerners and East Asians are fundamentally different (Rhee 48). It is this belief in the essential Asian mystical wisdom that has appealed to many of Zen Buddhism’s Western adapts. Furthermore, Zen stands in as a critique and/or a replacement for a number of different Western practices; for John Cage, for instance, it became an alternative to psychoanalysis, whereas for others, like Robert Pirsig and his 1974 *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, it replaced Western philosophy in general.

Precisely because of the West’s fascination with “Eastern” cultural practices and beliefs, it is perhaps tempting to ascribe an uncritically cosmopolitan identity on someone like Paik, who has lived in a number of different countries. Yet, here I will revisit Paik’s life: In the 1950s, as Japan tried to recover from the aftermath of a costly war and rapidly rebuilt its infrastructure, Paik looked to the West as the pinnacle of modernity and artistic modernism. But instead of going to New York, the capital of postwar artistic modernism, Paik went to Munich, Germany, Japan’s former ally that was also recovering from the same war. Although he spent less than a decade in Munich, it was here that he made the relationships that would result in lifelong friendships and collaborations. Ironically, it was also in Germany that he first became familiar with works of Japanese avant-gardes such as Yoko Ono, Shigeko Kubota (whom he would later marry), and others. During this time, he did not return to Korea and spent minimal time in Japan. Once he left Korea, in fact, he did not return for thirty years, and only after he had already received international recognition.

Indeed, John Cage and the works of other Fluxus artists have had a tremendous impact on how Paik has approached his art. Fluxus as a movement was extensively international in nature, with approximately two dozen Japanese artists participating in various aspects of the movement during its existence, influencing it greatly. Furthermore, as a neo-Dada movement, Fluxus wanted

to challenge the established art world. This motive is seen clearly in George Maciunas's 1963 *Manifesto*, which outlines the basic tenets of what Fluxus was trying to do as a movement. *Manifesto* is composed of three strips of reverse negative dictionary definitions of the word "flux," placed on a piece of paper, and under each strip are handwritten directives for the practitioners of Fluxus. Much like Tristan Tzara's *Dada Manifesto* a half century earlier, Maciunas wanted to deinstitutionalize art. In the first directive, Maciunas makes a call to "Purge the world of bourgeois sickness, 'intellectual,' professional & commercialized culture, PURGE the world of dead art, imitation, artificial art, abstract art, illusionistic art, mathematical art,—PURGE THE WORLD OF 'EURO-PANISM' [*sic*]!" Much as the horrors of World War I made the Dadaists reevaluate the relevance of institutionalized art, the events of the atomic age following Hiroshima and Nagasaki led the Fluxus artists to do the same. In this sense, Fluxus was not only Orientalist in its embrace of East Asian beliefs but also cosmopolitan in its rejection of "Europeanism"; in this sense this movement was ardently antiestablishment and anticapitalist.

Maciunas's *Manifesto*—and later that of Joseph Beuys, who merely replaced "Europeanism" with "Americanism"—was a declaration of cosmopolitan ideology. It is, then, no surprise that the Fluxus artists would want to replace the capitalism of the West and of Western art with a form of Zen Buddhism. In rebelling against the institutionalized ideals of European Enlightenment and modernism, the originators of Fluxus, through the influence of John Cage, were drawn to East Asian philosophies. As Alexandra Munroe explains, within Fluxus, "[t]he Japanese were welcomed as a collective manifestation of an Eastern sensibility that corresponded with such Flux-ideas as chance, minimalism, poetics, and the investigation of the simple and habitual acts of everyday life and their inherent relation to art" (218).

In the midst of these philosophical tensions, Paik, whose interest in Schoenberg brought him to Germany, caught between his desire for the modern and his Asian body and cultural heritage, found himself decidedly in an ambivalent position. In many ways, his art reflects this cosmopolitan/Orientalist expectation placed upon him. This is a tricky proposition because for non-Western cosmopolitans, there exists the danger of self-Orientalizing as a countermeasure to the pressures of modernism and globalization. Often, this self-Orientalism manifests itself as an essentialized past that is premodern and precapitalist, and therefore "pure" and free of the corrupting influences of the West. For someone like Paik, self-Orientalization was an element that he not only dealt with but also utilized in his work. This is not meant as a criticism but only to reiterate that an Asian artist in Europe or the United States is more likely to gain acceptance when he or she melds Eastern and Western elements together. Paik certainly incorporated—or even appropriated—Zen as a motif in his works.

Nonetheless, Paik also worked with one of the hallmarks of midcentury Western culture: television. In light of a piece like *TV-Buddha*, one could make the argument that he sought to destroy the divide between “East” and “West”—to allow, even force, the twain to meet and fuse—through the incorporation of televisual technology. Yet often his works are read through the lens of techno-Orientalism in which “Asian” becomes synonymous with “the image of a culture that is cold, impersonal and machine-like, an authoritarian culture lacking emotional connection to the rest of the world” (Morley and Robins 169). In this context, *TV-Buddha* takes on a more sinister twist and becomes not an antidote to Maciunas’s “Europanism” or Beuys’s “Americanism” of mid-century, but the symptom of a rising Asian technological dominance of the late twentieth century. The willful reading of Paik’s works as “Asian,” rather than as Continental European, means that Paik is further essentialized and his use of technology becomes naturalized as an expression of his “Asianness.” In other words, rather than seeing his use of Zen principles and technology as equal strategies for “entertaining” his audiences, critics see Paik as expressing something essential to his nature.

Perhaps, then, it would be misleading to look at Paik as someone melding Eastern and Western cultures, despite the temptation to do so. For instance, to say that he is bringing together the East and the West is to say that there is an essential East and a West, distinctively antithetical or inherently opposed to one another that can be mixed together into a cultural medley with recognizable parts. Paik is neither a bridge nor a conduit, at least not in the sense of connecting two opposites. Instead, he is someone who is expressing the sum of his experiences, as a Korean who has lived in Japan at a time when Korea was still very much a third world country and Japan was quickly refocusing its resources on international economic competition, *and* as an Asian living in Europe and the United States when “Asian beliefs” were very much in vogue even if Asian peoples were not. The fact that the television and the camera are incorporated with the Buddha statue should not be read as an invitation to read *TV-Buddha* as a reflection of Asian “dehumanized technological power” (Morley and Robins 170). Rather, it should be read in light of Paik’s experiencing multiple cultural modalities simultaneously; Paik is expressing Abdul Jan-Mohamed’s specular border, and the technology is merely a means to that end.

What Paik presents through his work is the ease with which various cultures and traditions come together and are changed through these contacts. Paik’s Buddha is one who has already been changed through several millennia of intercultural contact among India, Central Asia, and East Asia in terms of the doctrines that surround him as well as in the way he is represented artistically. Paik’s Buddhism, encountered through its Western practitioners such as Cage, is one that has already changed through its mutations in East Asia and through its exportation to Europe and America. This brings us to the case

of *TV-Rodin*. The differing receptions to *TV-Buddha* and *TV-Rodin* reveal an inherent Western bias to art and technology. What scholars of video art do not understand, or fail to mention, is that Rodin was an influential figure for prewar Japanese sculptors, greatly influencing the works of Ogiwara Morie and Takamura Kotaro. For many Japanese art lovers, however, their exposure to Rodin was mostly through photographs in Japanese-language art magazines. If we follow Walter Benjamin's argument regarding mechanically reproduced art, then surely these photographs in magazines have lost their aura. Indeed, seeing a two-dimensional photo reproduction of a three-dimensional sculpture leaves a great much to be desired. The significance of *TV-Rodin*, then, lies in the way many Japanese art lovers experience Western art, which is to say, via an intermediary medium such as print or TV. Furthermore, for many Asian museumgoers, Western art is mediated by differing histories and cultures that are foreign and at times incomprehensible. Those Japanese who embraced Rodin were in effect embracing the West at a time when Japan as a whole was modernizing (read: Westernizing) and rapidly industrializing. Western culture was seen as a necessary evil in Japan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a way to prevent the colonialism that rendered China and India impotent against the West. Rodin represented just one element in this overall embrace of Western culture in prewar Japan.

In this regard, both *TV-Buddha* and *TV-Rodin* are a part of the same investigation into the cultural exchanges that occur and are mediated by technology that makes cultural encounters even more frequent and fluid. For Paik, however, inhabiting an Asian body, when he utilizes "Asian" themes, art critics assume that he is drawing from insider/native knowledge to an extent that does not happen for Euro American artists. But by juxtaposing various technologies, artifacts, and themes, he demonstrates the encounters and changes that have been occurring specifically throughout the twentieth century in East Asia, Europe, and the United States, not to mention in himself as an "Oriental" in the West. Both *TV-Buddha* and *TV-Rodin* are the result of these intercultural encounters; not exactly an equal melding of two distinctive and unique, diametrically opposed, parts, it implies the multiple crossings of real and imagined borders and the mutations in religions and cultures throughout history. Ultimately, *TV-Buddha* in particular is an artifact that is already embodying these multiplicities, it being just the next incarnation in this cycle.

Notes

1. For a more in-depth discussion of such readings, see Jieun Rhee and Lee Yongwoo.
2. Of course, Paik's ability to see TV and video as a powerful medium is in no way new or revolutionary. Marshall McLuhan and Norbert Weiner saw the impact that new modes of transmitting information could have on modern society. McLuhan's

explanation of the “global village” in *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (1962) expressed the potential of technology—especially electronic mass media—to allow people to live and communicate in collapsed time-space, empowering individuals to be much more global in their everyday lives. Weiner’s discussion in *Cybernetics* (1948) of the flow and feedback of information influenced the way scientists and theorists began rethinking human-machine interface and human interactions in general. George Orwell certainly saw the sinister implications of this medium in his vision of a not-too-distant dystopian future.