The following interview with the New York-based pioneer video artist, Nam June Paik, took place during his visit to the 8th Biennale of Sydney.

N.Z.: Perhaps I could begin by asking you about your installation at Documenta 8 entitled: Beuys' Voice. What sort of things were you trying to do with that footage of Beuys' performance? Were you interested in registering it as a performance?

N.J.P.: That's a good question. But artists—generally speaking, you know—we don't really set out to do any concrete objective. So in my case, when I make an artwork, we start from a few given conditions. One condition was that I was invited to do a big work by Documenta. And then, we had just finished a performance with Joseph Beuys in Tokyo, where I played a piano and he—he kind of screamed. It was quite an interesting performance— he liked it very much. Also, Beuys is popular in Germany—he's popular everywhere. But this piece was for Germany! So I thought, I'm going to do something with Beuys on that performance. So first I tried to use multiple projectors but it didn't work out so well. Then there was a new technology available—multivision, or so-called 'TV Wall'. It's quite expensive they were renting it for ten thousand marks for three days. So I gave it up for a long time. But after all, Beuys had a big opportunity to exhibit his work and you don't get too many offers, and then, by that time, Beuys had died, so the information had become rather grim. So, through our friends, we inquired how much a couple of companies would charge for three days. So I gave up for a long time. But then there was no point in expecting your installation at the Hayward show we didn't have any money to buy it—them—we just copied them. However, in the Hayward show we didn't have any money to rent. So with this Documenta main channel which went into the T.V. Wall undecorated - you know, natural. Then two channels were decorated, computerized video. So, without the T.V. Wall, the proportion of Beuys-as one channel. The other two channels which showed your work with Beuys, but cated piece, because there were not only monitors which showed your work with Beuys, but other screens were showing a sort of unrelated scene. It was going by at tremendous speed. I found it most difficult to understand or to read what was going on. Was there any reason for this difference between the installations?

N.J.P.: Yes, that's a him consideration. In both shows we used identical tapes, because we didn't have any money to rent them—we just copied them. However, in the Hayward show we didn't have any money, so the T.V. Wall system. So we used this Documenta main channel which went into the T.V. Wall undecorated, you know, natural, except that piece at your retrospective in London, at the Hayward Gallery. It seemed more successful like that. It went very well. So that piece at your retrospective in London, at the Hayward Gallery. It seemed a more complicated piece, because there were not only monochrome images going by at tremendous speed. I found it more difficult to understand or to read what was going on. Was there any reason for this difference between the installations?

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N.Z. Are there some pieces that you think have worked particularly well, not only as a new process, but as a new way of saying something about something beyond video?

N.J.P. I get bad reviews still - *Art in America* recently wrote one. But I survive. If we think deductively, then certainly Beuys' Voice was successful. And another which was a very successful piece is TV Garden, where you see lots of T.V.s among the leaves. That was very successful I think for two reasons, three reasons. One is that people look down at T.V. here, so it was kind of a new position. And in a way, you are fixed into one T.V. generally, but you look around. And I deliberately made it to look around, but when you watched T.V. your eye got fixed. And most likely, the human instinct, the human nerve which is controlling the eyes' nervous system, is very happy that they are liberated from the one T.V. position, so that you can look around. And obviously, of course, the optic nerve likes that electronic impulse too, but also likes the natural habitat of looking around. So these two combinations made the people happier watching TV Garden.

And then, of course, many people had thought that television is against ecology, but in this case, television is part of ecology. Then it had nice colour, and nice rock n' roll music, and it was dark, with light flowing from leaves in various greens and various rhythms. And then people were leaning onto railings in kind of comfortable positions, and could talk to their neighbours, whereas when you’re watching T.V. or going to a movie, you don’t talk to your neighbour. But in this case, all those disciplines are out, and you can go in and out at your leisure, like at a John Cage concert. I think that basically speaking, the use of natural leaves and television - that paradox - was important for people.

N.Z. Well, I think you’ve said that you’re interested in humanizing television and video.

N.J.P. That came from Human Use of Human Beings - a book by Norbert Wiener. Norbert Wiener was a fifty-scientist. I think he’s a genius. Although it was corny, I used the phrase ‘How to humanize technology’ in the press release of the Howard Wise Gallery, in ’69. I thought it was very corny. But, for some reason, everybody quoted it and even now keep quoting it, you know, twenty years after! It was exactly in 1969 that I wrote that press release, anonymously. So, obviously, that rings a bell for many people.

N.Z. It’s probably the reverse of Andy Warhol’s claim that he wanted to be a machine, whereas you want machines to be human.

N.J.P. Yes. For some reason this kind of quotation becomes famous, so obviously people need that.

N.Z. And what do you think of contemporary culture as a whole? Would you say that we’re living in a corny culture?

N.J.P. Contemporary culture? As a whole?

N.Z. Well, that’s a very big question, and probably a silly question.

N.J.P. Yes. As you know, we are not Henry Kissinger - we are just a little player. I am generally optimistic about the human future, because of the Soviet crumbling. For instance, Milan Knizak, the Czech artist, was arrested three hundred and sixty times. He was in New York when the tanks rolled in ’68, but he chose to go over to Czechoslovakia. So he had a hard time. But he is now the President of the Royal Academy there. He was a real vagabond, a Fluxus artist. And then, the President of Lithuania, Vytautas Landsbergis, he was the best friend of George Macunias - they were classmates in grade school. His father and Landsbergis’ father were best friends. And so, obviously, although our Liberal Left betted on Karl Marx too long, and found they bet on the wrong horse, the horse of liberalism also won, so that’s very nice. Of course all intellectuals are against technology, and all for ecology, which is very important. But in a way, we are inventing more pollution-free technology. We intellectuals don’t like cars and television, but we have to admit that compared to Charles Dickens’ time, we are living better, no? So we must give up certain parts of intellectual vanity, and look at the good parts of so-called high-tech research. For instance, hydrogen power, which nobody’s talking about. It seems that people are getting smarter, and also that in the Western world people are getting less aggressive. When I look at the art world, they are playing games very harshly, but still they’re not as bad as corporate games. Australian, Japanese or Korean artists - or whoever - who are not playing games in New York shouldn’t pay so much attention to the New York art world. If you make your own art work and can make a living, then that’s good - if you’re happy and don’t have to dig up the ditches!

When we started out becoming an artist, we didn’t aim or even think about becoming a famous artist. To take fame out of art, well that’s the most important thing. Let’s make that the closing statement for today. To take fame out of the art world. That was the spirit of Fluxus.