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An un-materialization of Environment and a Frame of Art Education

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環境の非物質化と美術教育の枠

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1 ICC

In April 1997, NTT (Nippon Telephone and Telegraph Company) opened the Inter Communication Centre, which is a part of their cultural services, at the Opera City Tower in Nishi-Shinjuku, Tokyo. They explained that they wished to interface with media-technology and art on the theme of communication so that they could form a store (new style of museum) which could function as a base of information interchange worldwide. In today's circumstances where the Earth has been gradually covered by the immaterial environment (which is called 'intelligence network' i. e. the internet), it is quite clear that we need the power of art when we examine the virtual relationships and the problems which lie between information media and ourselves; moreover when we develop them into various possibilities. In addition, those artists who express themselves through the medium of multi-media technology will greatly change the concept of art itself.

I can focus on the term 'interactivity' as one of the outstanding characteristics which are in common with media arts displayed in the centre. When users interacted directly, the visual representations changed one after another. They are not completed objects, but user's performances change them into various things, or into certain directions and circumstances. It can be explained that one significant thesis on an existing art function, that is to say, appreciation equals creation, it realized as being an actual and physical experience. those representations will change into every direction by user's personal tastes, interests, knowledge, experiences, memories, and physical conditions etc... Besides, those variations in direction are far beyond the standpoints of selections which were input in advance. It surely speaks for itself that interactive exchanges of art exist between creators, works and users, and are not particularly new concepts in the circumstances of spiritual activity. However, the negation of the stationary self-completion of works, and the change to works with user's direct and physical performances have signs of changing

the basic structure of art, and there are great possibilities for it. But there seems to be one problem that most works are based only on a positive aspect of media-technology. I guess it will need a little more time and more extensive popularization for media-technology itself until works which have viewpoints of the real self-inspection or self-criticism appear.

I visited the biennial exhibition held in 1997. I would like to point out that a few works including standing displays attracted me personally. As regards "SEVEN MEMORIES" by Toshio Iwai, it was placed at the entrance of the fourth floor, it seems as if the latest media-technology has been already left behind like a relic. His work which seems to me lyrical reminds us of "THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES" of Ray Bradbury and of mysterious nostalgia. Concerning "BUY ONE, GET ONE" by Shu-Lea-Cheang of 'biennial 1997', he travels to each city of the world and he transfers real information onto a computer screen in ICC from each location, and then interactive users access it, the vector of movement to one place from another place which has various problems has quite deep political messages including the installation of the works themselves, and also has a similar concept to the work of Ingo Gunter and so called "SOCIAL SCULPTURE" that Joseph Beuys mentioned. Another work by Akitsugu Maebayashi brings us into the realm of science fiction through his work "AUDIBLE DISTANCE" which uses media-technology to link the senses of the human body, and sets up a place of communication which has changed the vision and the sense of hearing of human. (i. e. the manner in which we communicate by sight and sound has changed through the interaction of technology.) Or it may be viewed as human bodies being turned into unknown creatures with different organs of sense from human. And the work "INTERIOR" by Ken Feingold spreads out a nightmarish scenery which is similar to schizophrenia. I should say it is rather a materialization of profound portions which uses fragmentary images with every absurdity are blinking before our consciousness along a communicable and linguistic context which has come up to the surface in the process of our conscious activity, not only as an outburst of an illusion of virtual reality. It is a world of a discommunication which supports communication. It might be expressed only as a virtual phenomenon itself which happens outside of double windows, (e. g. by user's touching a model of the human body), in other words, only as an incident of the twilight zone which lies between reality and imagination, or between inside and outside.

2 Another Environment

Jean Baudrillard says; "Media and reality are blended together to such a degree that it is impossible to separate them out." This can be explained by imagining the existence of a huge and sort of transparent environment, i. e. internet. It changes the concept of reality and also reality itself, it thus eliminates originality (personality) as it takes 'the self' apart to be pluralized and dispersed.

For example, no one could say that international events which are shown on TV are unreal, just because they are only simulated pictures. In this way the world moves around and is only caught through this reflection. We have already thrown ourselves into an invisible and virtual environment called Internet. Direct interchanges between nature, other people, and the world, which are directly caught by the hu-

man senses, are not always real. On the contrary, the reality of direct physical interchanges with the world is constantly changing through interaction with the media.

By the interference of the media between the world and the human body, the world will change first, and then the human body will change. For example, when we are very nearsighted and all of a sudden we have to wear strong glasses, we can't help feeling strange. It's as if our bodies are floating and we can't keep our feet on the ground, although we have clear vision at the same time. It shows that the visual world has been changed by the medium called ("glasses") and clearer vision resulting blends with the strange physical sensation of floating and adjusts ourselves to it. This might be explained in a similar fashion to a blind person who has had a cornea transplant and has had to face difficulties until he/she could walk without bumping against things. Now-a-day's lenses are used in electronic microscopes, communication satellites, and radio telescopes which have a wide application from tiny distances measured in nanometer to the immense distances of galaxies measured in million of light years.

Or it might be easily explained by imagining the different organization between body feeling and sight when we ride on a bicycle or drive a car. As regards a bicycle, it is a world in which we need both a sense of movement and a sense of balance. It is a world organized by sight and sound when we are in motion. It is different from walking and running as riding a bicycle constructs a world based on the physical feeling of the human body. Conversely, driving a car obliges us to put ourselves into an artificial world where we moved only with our hands and legs in an enclosed space and by which visual representations of the world move with much greater speed. We realize that if we are comparing the difference between the world created by the media i. e. the bicycle and the car with the human body, the physical senses connecting us to a constructed world greatly differs by the medium lying between them, e. g. the bicycle and the human body and the car and the human body. In reference to sight, this means that not only will the mechanism of sight change, but also what is seen is interpreted differently. I suppose that it is because the switchover between two media takes the way of separating social organization, human relationships, and communication, and because it is reunited along a new medium which is not simply an increase in the distance of movement, the speed, and the amount of transport.

Looking back at the past, we can say that in each period people have been organizing our bodies and the world with every medium available, using various symbols, such as language, religion, machines for producing, the letter, paper, the ship, the train, the plane, the newspaper, and the radio, etc... In other words, these media systematize our perception and recognition of these media. And most of us won't be able to get out of such a systematic time-frame. If our five senses are united and work together, and they bring a reality into existence along such a time-frame, this reality would be called a simulation in the first place in each time-period. Today we have been trying to unite together our bodies and the construction called virtual reality (which means immaterial and hypothetical environment called Internet).

We rather feel that natural beauty selected from all over the world, e. g. the devastated forests by acid rain, and the vanishing tropical rain forests on TV are all real. In nature, breezy wind, the smell of air,

sunshine, the whisper of a stream, we feel that they are beautiful and comfortable and they relax us. Such feelings themselves are simulations which are performed in the frame of perception— including a sort of mood formed through the common consciousness of the crises of the times of vanishing nature and losing our physical sense— that is constructed in advance by the media, such as TV melted into reality. It is possible to say that reality traces TV, and TV creates reality.

Baudrillard calls that situation hyper-realization. Today our lives are a consumption of symbols and a production of symbols which are not based on the preservation of life, in every aspect of clothes, foods, and living. Nothing in existence is original and turning things into simulacrum makes the reality hyper-real with greater speed. In addition, it has been proving that turning everything into simulacrum means that everything becomes simulacrum. Every value, authority, and identification between the world and the human body is spreading everywhere and is homogenizing in both good way and bad way, transcending nations and people by media features which easily travel through space and time. The immaterial environment which is invisible and, like twilight covers this world, former reality is obliged to get endlessly thinner. At the same time, it will be clear that the environment has crossed out our personal experiences and the human body is only a medium.

I presume that it will also take apart a consistent self-image, this self-image being the major component containing our minds. The existence of control centre, which is self-consciousness, is a set-up by a systematic framework of modern rationalists. In the field of brain science, consciousness and emotion are regarded as mechanical reaction forms of plural parallel matrices of the human brain, Such as existence form where the self equals someone else doesn't have a control centre and is itself the system of an information media network where each terminus has the centre at the same time.

We can surely say that we create plurality within ourselves in society, at work, at home, and any other place. We change and adjust our bodies depending on each symbolic space, such as school, hospital, theater, hotel, park, etc... Such an adjustment has been considered to be maintained by the consciousness of 'the self' which contained within the skin. But nowadays, in an electronically created media environment, it is possible to be studded with plurality at the same time using network space. It is not only instantly connected with plural termini, but also belongs to plural hypothetical groups of society. The plural self exists as members of totally different plural societies over nations and peoples. It will be possible to live (the way we are separated into) our plural selves. Naturally, we would belong to hypothetical societies more deeply than former real societies, and I guess this situation will be more realistic to live in, therefore hypothetical society will be increased.

For instance, the problem of having Neo-Nazis on the network space that Germany now has to solve would be a typical example. Apart from the problems that will be also important, such as anti-social associations and groups, network measures against criminals and securities, I guess it will be very different from the existence of such groups and their organizations. And also, I guess the issue of 'the self' as pluralized today is somehow reflected on the works (representations) of Yasumasa Morimura and

especially on the works of Cindy Shaman, although there are various interpretations.

3 The Changing Frame of Art Education

It seems to me that both the post-modern concept by JF·Lyotard and the concept of simulation and simulacrum have strong connection with the changing social system of capitalism by information-originated societies and express almost the same thing, although they have the different way of approach between them (the way of wisdom and the way of production). If I can quote from Lyotard's saying, "Our society has lost the value and the standard to communicate in the place of education and at home by the finishing of 'Big Story' (Marxist slogan) which supported the values, the systems, and the standards of society (i. e. the change and development of social form by the class struggle of Marxism, and the release of human being). In the process of children's socialization, the social values and the standards themselves to be taken in have been compared. It seems that today's schools have been trying hard to keep a system which has become a mere shell. Before anything else, about 20,000 pupils who refuse to go to school now shows that children are already living in an information-oriented society such that the structure of production has changed and the values and the standards have become diversified.

Let's take an example of the problem of sex. There is a generation gap which leads to various situations which children have to face, i. e. there is too much information about sex in real society, and sex education taught in school. In spite of calling into question the meaning of sex education in school, it seems that the system remains unchanged and there are contradictions rising everywhere. Even in education of 'the importance of life' and 'communication' which are referred to as watchwords, we need to change from the organization of subject and curriculum to the class organization over it, if we wish to try to change it seriously. The number of teachers and deviation-centred way should be changed. I don't think that it will be possible to change the present education system.

Before we talk about the problem of the school curriculum, I think we first need to recognize the existence of an essential problem about the system of all education. I rather think that the present school curriculum can't do anything about the problem of a changing society.

I suppose that every course of study is required even more to take measures against social problems of today from outside than we construct the systematization from inside, including teaching methods which are based on the clear originality of each subject. And in our society, it is clear when we give an example of an information-oriented problems are not separated from the world circumstances over the communities or countries, and I guess the frame of such a vision will be needed to expand and reunite. For example, in a sense, the financial difficulties Japan now faces have been caused by today's circumstances in which world capital is formed, i. e. electronic money comes and goes as a new monetary form on the networks, and the share transaction of each country on the network. It seems that both the education problem and the financial problem are basically overlapping.

Then how does today's art education take measures against situations?

According to the changing of content of textbooks from the past to the present, it is certain that the frame of art education is significantly different depending upon the times, and the problems that each time has been constantly reflected from the standpoint of genre of art. I suppose that the recognition of the frame itself and the value of the time will be revealed when we differentiate the times, such as the Meiji-era, the Taisho-era, or between the prewar and the postwar. Recently, various modern art forms have been adopted like CG, cartoons, works of Andy Goldsworthy at the junior high school, or in the playing of 'installation' and united works at primary school, and from communication and ecology to pop culture, today's problems that art is truly connected with modern society are certainly adopted.

In the present education system, I fear that it is severely limited to the introduction of variety in modern art, and to a superficial knowledge from beginning to end. I also fear that today's important theme, which art education has essentially connected with the time and the society, is not fully developed, in spite of presenting through the teaching materials of appreciation.

It is not only because of the present textbooks, i. e. because there is too much information crammed within them (the question how we appreciate a peaceful landscape picture by a photographer like Bernard-Faucon who presents mysterious spaces of the present-day which are full of images of juvenile love and where holiness mingles with immorality will remain). I also don't believe that only art teacher's abilities should be blamed. (although it is indeed an important factor.) I suppose that the existence of all the framework of 'education of sensibilities' that art education has taken a part to build a power of life, a thoughtful mind, and character in relation with other subjects which focused on theories and thoughts will be a problem. the reason it is difficult to imagine such abstract words as a thoughtful mind, a power of life, and character building seems that every human image to be built, that is in common with the society and the time, has been taken apart in accordance with the change in social structure. I guess that especially one of the most important functions of modern art, that is the part of the recognition connected with profound understanding and sympathy to various problems and contradictions of today's circumstances surrounding human being, has not been taken up sufficiently in class because of the frame of sensibility-centred subject (i. e. art education).

The art somehow reflects human circumstances in which they co-exist. Although we will go beyond the bound of giving examples, such as the problem of reality and communication in an information-oriented society, the global problem of environment, the problem of life between the North and the South, the problem of a gap of production, the problem of constant regional dispute, the problem of starvation, and the essential problem of 'What is art?' or 'What are humans?' It seems that the more excellent the art work is, it somehow has greater connections with such essential problems of today, whatever shape it is, whatever method it is, whatever level of consciousness the artist has. I expect that the capacity to grasp the core of the total problem as crossing with the depth, the width, the genre that modern works have, enable to link up a private activity and consciousness in every direction of societies from the area of art, depending upon the way that art is taught.

4 Epilogue

I guess that the frame of art education, which is like the present way of character building, will change naturally under the circumstances, in the same way that an information-centred society of the world with media networks have been greatly changing the social structure, the ways of communication and reality. Surely, the problem of the way to an information-centred society doesn't always have positive aspect because it has something to do with various phenomena of social pathology, such as an imperfect communication, the increase of border lines, and every problem in the place of education. That's why there is an opinion in which we'll have to aim at education for regaining communication or for recovering our bodies. Perhaps it means that we request a new 'Big Story' rather than looking for today's meaning of life in the 'Small Story' (personal way of living) which is divided into sections and in further divided as Lyotard mentions. But perhaps it doesn't mean that we simply aim at regaining or recovering anyway. Takashi Tachibana mentions that the problem of the global environment is impossible to solve without the latest scientific technology. It seems that the problems of the human body and communication have similarity. Perhaps we can find a way how to solve the problem of art education through the possibility of using an information-centred way. But I suppose that art education of today begins with linking to every problem which an information-centred society causes.

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