

## A Fetishism of Divided Time

KARIYA Yosuke

Translation: Alfred BIRNBAUM

"THE SECOND / Time Based Art from the Netherlands"

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ICC Gallery A, D

Documenta X, held in 1997, evidenced a growing tendency toward electronic image-making in contemporary art. Within this trend, how are we to regard the element of "time"? Though hardly a large-scale exhibition, ICC's *THE SECOND* was remarkable for the sensitive vision of the participating artists. Planned by Montevideo/Time Based Arts = Dutch Media Art Institute, the exhibition has traveled from Amsterdam to Mexico City, Taipei, and now Tokyo's ICC.

Montevideo/Time Based Arts = Dutch Media Art Institute was founded in 1978 by the exhibition's guest curator René COELHO as an organization dedicated to fostering local Dutch media artists as well as showing, selling and archiving their works. As the name states so emblematically, TBA's take on media art focuses on associations with time. In many ways, the present exhibition is a sequel to *IMAGO, fin de siècle in Dutch Contemporary Art*, also curated by COELHO in 1989 and subsequently toured



Peter BOGERS. «Heaven»  
(1995)  
Installation: 17 B&W videos,  
11 audio channels

to eight countries.

Media art, which implements sound, film and video mediums, is essentially predicated upon time. Just how media art reflects on time is of particular interest to this writer. For needless to say, running video images alone does signify not any real grasp on time. Even so, rather than even "time-based," more apt keywords for the overall exhibition might well have been "detail and whole" or "aspect and recomposition." Almost every work played upon by such expectations by displaying subdivided and fragmented data to viewers via video monitors and computers, then leaving the viewers to recompose for themselves; the result of such minutely segmented and parsed time frames being that the very organic flow of time and continuity of duration no longer registered (at least not to me).

Take for instance Peter BOGERS's «Heaven» (1995), the "central installation" (COHELHO) of the exhibition: 17 small video

monitors are placed in a white room, some hanging on the wall, some suspended in space, some sitting on the floor. Each displays part of an object (a clock, a sleeping cat, a person) one might find in an actual room, sound and image all repeating with exacting regularity in one-second cycles. Upon entering this curious space, we are forced to take in as many of these instantaneous image fragments as possible and assemble them into some kind of whole (if only to dispel the unsettling atmosphere of the room). What emerges is a kind of early cubist time-space, where viewers must subjectively analyze and synthesize from their perceptions of the monitors.

The exhibition also includes two other works by BOGERS, both highly acclaimed in Holland. In one of these, «Retorica» (1992), two TV monitors show a father and child trying to communicate. Such a scheme of two TV's conversing was previously seen in Bruce NAUMAN's «Clown Torture» (1987),



Left Peter BOGERS. «Retorica» (1992) nstallation: 2 B&W videos, 2 audio channels.  
Right Peter BOGERS. «Sacrifice» (1994) Interactive sculpture: photography  
Video Sculpture: 1 B&W video, 1 audio channel

but whereas NAUMAN's two clowns repeating their tales ad nauseum presented a nightmarish tableau of closed communication, BOGERS's soundtrack of a child's baby talk and the father's responses paint a far happier smile. Yet as only the eyes and mouths are shown, even this communication begins to taken on a deviously serpentine aspect.

Another BOGERS's work, «Sacrifice» (1994) situated strategically at the entrance to the exhibition space, peers into the open mouth of the artist himself drowning (dissolving?) in a bathtub. Displayed alongside is a large photograph of the production studio showing the outlandishly huge device the artist used to shoot the scene, the sheer mechanical complexity of zooming in on himself reduced to a mouth, juxtaposed with the sacrificial title putting a somehow sinister slant on the image. It turns the commonplace TV into a fetishistic implement forcing us to examine the human form piece by piece. A similar

tendency towards fetishism is also seen in A.P. KOMEN's «Face Shopping» (1994), in which women's faces are projected close-up onto a row of four screens, the artist persistently following their inadvertent eyelid twitches and facial ticks, causing an uneasiness in the viewer who is made to focus in on these women's more "indiscreet" moments.

Different approaches to the theme of subdivided time apart from the fetishistic gaze are presented by Bea DE VISSER and Boris GERRETS. In DE VISSER's «The Skipping Mind / A Film about Forgetting» (1994), the artist builds an utterly lifelike moving "mosaic" of women's portraits culled from old books. In GERRETS's «Time/Piece» (1994), the artist rotates a still video image to create a moving panorama by stroboscopic effect. Both works are displayed so as to openly illuminate their workings. GERRETS's work is set up on a bronze pedestal reminiscent of an astrolabe, inscribed with a



Bea DE VISSER. «The Skipping Mind / A Film about Forgetting» (1994)  
Block installation: video projector, BVU; laserdisk, 25 paintings

quote from St. Augustine: "Time is the mobile image of immobile eternity."—words that might epitomize both works. Indeed, both DE VISSER and GERRETS have produced "reborn" or "reincarnate" readings of the well-known principle behind film and animation, whereby a succession of slightly shifting still appears to produce motion, breathing new life into fragmented time.

In the exhibition catalog, Rudi FUCHS points out that "the patient will" of traditional Dutch painting is still alive in the production of contemporary Dutch artists. To be sure, the various participating artists of *THE SECOND* cast an exceedingly patient and finely tuned gaze upon their subjects, such even the most familiar of relate are dissected down to mere fragments. Some artists like DE VISSER and GERRETS patch these fragments back together in Frankenstein fashion as if to reassemble an organic continuum of time reborn.

But most clearly what these works bear

witness to is the time awareness of this media age. For is not the world we face an intellectual construct of fragmentary data, in which we must process fragments of time and information via rational means alone? Has not our gaze microscope down to details? While I find this image of time somewhat distorted and disquieting, in Jaap DE JONGE's «O.T.S.» (1995), an antique octagonal display case for a collection of fragmentary videoworks situated near the entrance next to BOGERS's piece saved the day for me by the artist's precious loving stance toward media art.

KARIYA Yosuke

Born 1970 in Yokohama. After working at the Watari Museum, he proceeded to postgraduate studies in Aesthetics and Art History at Keio University Graduate School. He currently researches on Josef BEUYS and 20th century German art.

Upper left Jaap DE JONGE. «O.T.S.» (1995)

Interactive sculpture: display case, 8x4 glass balls, 8 video monitors, 32 prisms, push button

Lower Left A.P. KOMEN. «Face Shopping» (1994)

Installation: 4-channel videos, 4 projection screens, laserdisk, audio system

Light Boris GERRETS. «Time/Piece» (1994)

Interactive sculpture: industrial bronze, motor drive, video monitor. 875mm (height) x 492mm (diameter)

