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Community, The Common, and Art

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Seon Ryeong Cho received Ph.D. on *The Concept of Lacan's Fundamental Fantasy and Art Theory*. She began her career studying psychoanalysis and this eventually led to contemporary art and general image culture. Recently Cho is surveying the interactive relationship among autonomy, technology, image and authority. Her publications include *Lacan and Art* and *Image Apparatus Theory*, which will be published soon. She also curated various exhibitions that dealt with an intersection between artistic scene and social scene such as *Dream House*, *Monumental Journey*, *Catastrophology*, and *Dancers*. Her most recent project is an exhibition called, *Allegory, Objects, Art of Memory*, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea, which interpreted archive as 'object's allegory.

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A contemplation on commons or the common are becoming important issues in social movements and artistic practices. But the discourse of community has always been an important topic. What is the difference between the conventional discourse of community and the current one? Or how should they be different? This essay examines how a matter of 'the common' is thought and practiced in contemporary art, centering on the notion of 'the common' introduced in the book "Commonwealth" (2011) written by Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt. Changes in the discourse of community and the status of political art in Korea will be discussed here especially with a focus on the Korean situation.

What is 'the common?' According to Negri and Hardt, it refers to resources which do not belong to specific individuals or groups and with which free access, free use, free expression and free interaction¹ are available. Historically, the common means natural resources such as air, water and soil. In addition, it also includes immaterial assets co-produced by a number of people in today's networked society - knowledge, information, image, affect, sign, code, and so on.² These are usually produced and shared through the internet, including those created by the urban life. Negri and Hardt emphasize the common in

1 Negri, A. & Hardt, M. (2011). *Commonwealth*, trans. Jeong, N. Y. & Yoon, Y.K.. April Books. 2014, p.391.

2 *ibid.*, p.16.

the latter sense: the scarcity of these assets does not decrease and their value even increases, even if their users and frequency of use increase. But what is important in thinking about the common is the fact that it reverses the perspective of seeing the dynamics between domination and resistance.

“It is important to see that from the standpoint of the common, the standard narrative of economic freedom is completely inverted. According to that narrative, private property is the locus of freedom that stands against public control. Now instead the common is the locus of freedom and innovation—free access, free use, free expression, free interaction—that stands against private control, that is, the control exerted by private property, its legal structures, and its market forces.”³

The common is the foundation of society but its existence rarely comes into view. Nowadays, in fact, neoliberalism continuously seizes the common and makes it belong to a minority of people. Negri and Hardt argue that the duty of today’s revolutionary forces is to get the common back from this private capture. Their argument can be seen as a kind of paradigm shift because it reversed the political direction of the modern world, which was the freedom of the individual in opposition to the group. They note the dilemma that individual freedom can no longer be radical under capitalism which is based on the principle of privatization. Now the essential is the common, not the private. The private becomes a reactionary force going counter to the circumstance. And privatization is redefined as the ‘failure of the common.’ Capitalism, which privatizes the common becomes the obstacle to production. Then, what is necessary is to take back things that have already existed as the basis of society (and that are becoming more significant) instead of forcibly creating things that do not exist. Therefore, Negri and Hardt state the revolution they say is ‘immanent.’ Revolution is not about adopting a different order, but about changing the direction of things that already exist.

Negri and Hardt do not deal with art directly, but according to

their arguments, the features of the radical value that art pursues has also changed. In the era of modernism, ‘the private’ was at the forefront of resistance. It was founded on the aesthetic value dating back to the romanticism of the 18th century. One can find the root of this value in the famous passage “the free and self-conscious being as well as the world come out of nothing,” from “Earliest System-Programme of German Idealism.”⁴ Afterwards, art was regarded as a program preserving the personality in standardized society. Culture industry that Adorno and Horkheimer criticized was a cultural version of the identity and totality of capitalism. Art went against it under the names of non-identity and individuality. For Adorno, the irreducible individuality of art per se was both a means and an end. Nowadays, however, this front is changed. Apart from Negri and Hardt, there is a universal recognition that the ideal of modernism, which is the freedom of individuals, is ultimately nothing but another version of a capitalist republic built on private possession.

It is also important to understand that the notion of the common does not mean ‘the public’ opposite to the private. Negri and Hardt are not Marxists. Pointing out the way socialism functioned as the shackles of social production, they reject all kinds of national regulations including socialism. The proposition that “the common exists in a dimension different from the private and the public, and is basically free from the two”⁵ shows the impact of the collapse of the Soviet Union and of Eastern Europe after the 1990s on the Western leftists. Thoughts of Negri and Hardt resulted from the efforts to search for the values that Western leftists needed to pursue after the collapse of socialism as well as the criticism about the liberalist concept of the subject. They talk about an exodus or a revolution escaping from capitalism, while stressing that their political line is neither Marxism nor Leninist theory of the extinction of the state. Negri and Hardt claim that the revolution they say is a sort of transformation and re-appropriation powered by the elements immanent in capitalism. In this regard, it is a revolution and a reform at the same time. Then,

4 Unknown author, *Earliest System-Programme of German Idealism*, eds. Lacoue-Labarthe, P. & Nancy, J-L, trans. Hong S.H. *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*. Greenbee Books. 2015, p.70.

5 Negri, A. and Hardt, M. *ibid.*, p.391.

can we apply the same trajectory to the history of Korea and Asia? These days, there is a lot of criticism about the view of considering the history of Asia as a unique (or distorted) form while seeing Western history as a universal one because of its dichotomous frame. According to this new perspective, modernity is not a subject of the West, but a matter of both the imperialistic West and the colonial Asia. Asia did not owe Western modernity. Rather, Western modernity depended on the existence of the colonial Asia. In this sense, the phenomenon of ‘heterogeneous coexistence of different times’ in Korean modern history may probably be a driving force that created an imaginary object of ‘Western linear time’ rather than a Western-style distortion or failure. Then we can discuss the characteristics of history without a model of Western modernity.

In Korea, the discourse of community appeared as a natural, and sometimes a proclamatory base, not as an alternative to the evils of liberalism. Since the Korean resistance movement was based on the historical experience of forced modernization by others, it was supported by a combination of nostalgia about communitarianism and a socialistic prospect. However, considering the fact that a rural community in the past was maintained by the reign of men/seniors/noblemen far from a group of free individuals based on equality, one can understand why the discourse of left-wing nationalism is easily combined with regression. The student movement and labor movement in the 1980s in Korea took place in the name of another group against the group of state power. Not only the perception of ‘private capture of the common’ but also the notion of ‘individual opposing to the group’ rarely existed. The most urgent goal was to obtain a democratic procedure at a political level. The notions of freedom and creativity were not the slogans of resistance forces. Furthermore, they were criticized as something bourgeois and elite. The idea that art should portray the “reality of the people” prevailed at that time.

The representative artworks of the time were the hanging painting showing the essence of collective creation and the print, a medium of ‘educating’ the people. In 1989, the hanging picture entitled *The History of the National Liberation Movement*, created

by art movement groups in 5 cities of the nation and 30 college art movement clubs together, was the typical output of work during this period. This series aimed at establishing a nationwide association of Minjung Art Movement consists of 11 hanging paintings dealing with the subjects from Donghak Peasant Movement to the prospect of reunification with a strong nationalist sentiment. The slogan “popular content in the national form” directly shows the objectives of Minjung Art. ‘National form’ means that it was newly processed and borrowed from the perspective of left-wing nationalism instead of imitating the patterns of traditional society as they are (Artist Oh Yoon provides a model example of this work). With the advent of the period of political stability after the 1990s, collective activities in Minjung Art faded away. Minjung Art that survived individually got as individualistic as the wave of ‘postmodernism’ which appeared at the time; it got rid of political features rapidly and some of it retrograded as a nostalgic indigenouness.

Candlelight vigils that took place between autumn 2016 and early 2017 in Korea brought a huge change in the characteristics of Korean resistance movement: a shift from collective resistance movement to liberalist resistance movement. It was meaningful because liberalist forces obtained political power for the first time after Korea’s liberation. The candlelight rally was different from resistance movements of the past characterized by a group-versus-group struggle for power. There was neither an official organizer nor a ‘steely formation.’ Many people joined the rally by themselves. Protesters freely walked around without shouting slogans or forming a scummage. A candlelight vigil was not a struggle propelled by a solid organization or a single cause, but a temporary event in which individuals with different desires and tastes got together in pursuit of a temporary goal. Citizens gathered at the plaza in order to transform and monopolize, not to subvert the state. The state here appears as a universal space, ‘a forum where popular sovereignty is realized,’ not as a high-rank organization ruling over the people.

Those who share the sentiments of the past activist movement criticized the candlelight protest as they believed its peaceful nature was an conservative way of admitting the framework of the current

law. Meanwhile, citizens with a liberalist political sensibility had a different viewpoint in regards to the interpretation of its nonviolence and legality. For them, the observance of the law did not mean an obedience to power, but a principle to follow to take the public space back from those who took the public property, nation. The concept of legality was interpreted as a warning to those who endangered the existence of a community, and took and ‘privatized’ public property. The perception of ‘resistance to privatization’ emerged for the first time in Korean modern political history. Of course, when the legality in itself has a radical value, it is an exceptional case; the law is considered conservative in that it basically excludes the weak who are not protected by the law. However, the law in that circumstance was regarded as a common regulation, not a documented power.

Meanwhile, it is paradoxical that reasonable and rational citizens who participated in the candlelight protests are not different from those who took the lead against the hatred towards refugees, women, Korean Chinese and the weak. Whereas the era of political movement that does not suppress individual freedom has just arrived, the extreme egoism, absence of social consciousness as well as sentiments of hatred and fear are pervasive in our society; it makes Korean society’s topography more complicated. This hatred and fear overwhelm the Korean society again in the form of another nationalism. This hate and nationalist sentiment on the basis of setting a boundary between ourselves and others erased the notion of ‘the common’ again and the ‘common subjectivity’ that has just begun are in danger of coming back to the retrogressive collectivism.

Negri and Hardt believe that ‘the common’ can exist as a permanent order through ‘multiple’ self-organizations and educations, but I agree more with Jacques Rancière’s view that the political subject appears unexpectedly in an exceptional manner. Rancière contends that politics is not about winning power, but is an exceptional work of creating a forum of discord. For Rancière, democracy is derived from the possibility⁶ that is always open to the new appearance of this subject that ‘appears and disappears.’ In my opinion, the demands for ‘the common’ in which the power of the crowd erupts are supposed

6 Rancière, J. *Aux Bords du Politique*, trans. Yang C.R. The Road Publishing. 2013, p.111.

to be temporary. And after the explosive power ebbs away, in other words, after the common identity is institutionalized, the subjectivity becomes the value to be sought repeatedly. Above all, it must be art that can undertake such a role in this era.

Rancière claimed the homogeneity between politics and art through the concept of “the redistribution of the sensible” (*le partage du sensible*). According to him, politics and art are the acts of redistributing the sensible because they disturb the spatiotemporal order created by ruling powers and involve new sensibilities so that they can be seen and heard.⁷ Apart from Rancière’s argument, art is no longer confined to the name of autonomy today. In society in which image, sign, code and act are the outcomes of the production, art is not placed at the edge of society any longer. Nowadays, art interacts with ordinary acts, symbols and relations at the center of life. It is also related to the fact that contemporary labor is “relational and immaterial” in the words of Christian Marazzi.⁸ Such an overlap of art and everyday life in contemporary society is theorized as a notion of “relational aesthetics (*esthétique relationnelle*) by Nicolas Bourriaud. According to Bourriaud, art no longer dreams of an autonomous private space, while intervening in daily life and establishing new relations. The forms of art overlap with those of life.

“Therefore, artists focus on inventing models of relations and sociability that their work will build among viewers more obviously... I want to emphasize that the forms indicating the sphere of human relations beyond the relational characteristics inherent in artwork now become a perfectly qualified artistic ‘form.’ Rallies, meetings, demonstrations, a variety of cooperations among people, games, parties, venues of banquets, to sum up, the whole ways of establishing meetings and relations are the models of aesthetic objects to be explored in itself in today’s society.”⁹

However, when it comes to the question of art, there is an important

7 *ibid.*, p.226

8 Christian Marazzi, *Capital and Affects*, trans. Suh C.H. Galmuri Publishing. 2014.

9 Bourriaud, N. *Esthétique Relationnelle*, trans. Hyun, Ji-yeon. 2011, p.49.

point to know: Although art seems to be located at the heart of life, it is not life itself. As Hal Foster pointed out in the text on the dilemma of the avant garde, art is an act that takes the distance with life itself as its basis of existence.¹⁰ The fact that the common exists and the act of making it seen and heard or ‘visualizing’ it are two separate matters. As explained previously, the existence of the common is easily hidden in daily lives. Capital privatizes the common and the state makes it the object of public regulation. To expose the common that continues to be hidden, or to “visualize the common” is one of the contemporary roles of art today.

The idea that art reveals the things that life itself does not show while intervening in life has existed throughout time. In this sense, today’s art is not different from that of the past. Its paradigm and directions only changed. One of the most radical tasks that political art faces now is to expose ‘the common’ that is hidden and invisible in society dominated by private possession and public regulation. Then the way of revealing it is sensible and sensitive rather than conceptual or cognitive. It enables viewers to experience something that is considerably unconscious but with a stronger potential within ordinary bodies, images, signs, space and time. It is a way of revealing the existence as ‘the generative’ rather than reenacting something that already exists. In a Heideggerian sense to some extent, the existence of the common is presented as an experience of the ‘truth as an event.’

Will it be possible to create a genealogy of visualizing the common in Korea? Korea has little history of art movement with slogans of freedom and creativity, and the distinction between the notion of the common and that of the communitarianism of traditional society is often blurred; these are different from the fact that individual artists and artworks can be regarded as the ‘visualization of the common.’ Instead of applying the concept of causal continuity and of development between one era and another era, one can understand the existence of a ‘different time’ that coexists in the same era or the arrangement of different relations. To create the genealogy of Korean art in pursuit of the ‘visualization of the common,’ two types

¹⁰ Foster, H. *Return of the Real*, trans. Lee, Y.W, Cho, J.Y. & Choi, Y.H. Kyungsung University Press. 2010.

of forms can be discussed: flashmob and network. These two are directly and indirectly connected to and nourished from political acts such as demonstrations. Among a few reasons why a demonstration is considered as an important event, we can deal with it from the aspect of 'crisis' because the question of the foundation of society appears when fractures are found and a smooth flow of everyday life is stopped. The two areas are overlapped in that art also contributes to interrupting daily lives at times.

The answer to the question "Did art as a visualization of the common take place as an event in candlelight protests?" is ambivalent. Meanwhile, a new kind of political art rarely appeared in candlelight rallies. Most of the artists who occupied Gwanghwamun Square were those who shared the sentiment of the past activist movement. In addition, there were not particularly new modes of expression, either. On the other hand, however, it showed the possibility that the characteristic of the candlelight vigil itself was similar to art or could be the bud of new art. Temporary and sporadic properties of the candlelight community can be explained as a kind of play, 'flashmob.' This decentralized and random community was similar to the play group gathering for a flashmob. (Besides, musical actors also got together in the form of a flashmob and sang together.) In terms of image making, sprouting sensibilities of new political art were found in ordinary citizens. There were many people who held the eccentric banners saying 'Korean Confederation of Cats' and 'The United States Racoons Union Korean Branch,' which seemed to be irrelevant to politics. These protesters were not resolute and serious fighters, but individualistic players. These sporadic plays demonstrated that the protesters did not gather under the same goal and slogan. They also showed a harmonious combination of the playful aspect of ordinary life and the seriousness of political acts. For them, participating in protests was not a resolute behavior giving up everyday life, but an act that coexists with daily life.

The candlelight movement was a case that visualized the common from the case itself. On the other hand, artists should create a symbolic situation. Can we find this kind of work in contemporary Korean art? It is not common but we can see some notable new tendencies. The

exhibition *Urban Ritornello* (September-December 2017) held at Ilmin Museum of Art presented works including such tendencies: The Seoul version of *Complaints Choir* that began in 2005 by the Finnish artist couple Kalleinens and the joint project filed-timeline that 8 twitterians recorded the event at their own place. New types of works are seemingly an extension of the old community art in that they are a sort of collective creation, but they show new features by not situating themselves as the representatives of a specific status or class. In other words, these works are differentiated from the political works of the past because of their ‘democratic’ characteristics.

Even though democracy has been criticized by those who point out the limits of its liberalistic subjectivity, Rancière advocates this notion by claiming that the elimination of democracy is equal to that of politics. According to Rancière, democracy is a notion, which is not based on a certain characteristic. Instead it has a sole characteristic of not having a characteristic. He argues that a democratic subject or the subject that was called ‘demos’ in ancient Greece is an exceptional existence that cannot be included in a group in terms of quantitative calculation and that disturbs the quantitative order. The shift of this paradigm of “an exception is universal” justifies art’s dealing with the matters of democracy. Art has always been an area of exceptions.

A flashmob type of performance is compatible with democratic work. Such work has its basis on ‘whoever’ with specific characteristics eliminated instead of supporting or making a model of certain classes. In other words, there is no fantasy about others. A series of performances (by Kim Soo-kyung, Song Ho-cheol, Jung Woong-sun, Kim Duk-jin, Kim Jin-seon, Yoo Hye-won, Choi Ra-yu, etc.) that took place at the rooftop in Moonrae-dong, Seoul as part of the project *Politics of the Roof*(2014) are interesting cases. They occupied the rooftop, which was considered as an exceptional and redundant space in our everyday life and turned redundancy into universality. In this regard (in that they showed the rooftop could be a democratic space that can be occupied by anybody), this project appears similar to the redistribution of the sensible that Rancière argued.

The performances by the artist group Okin Collective (Lee Jeong-min, Jin Shiu, Kim Hwa-yong) presented in the recent few years,

including *Okin Manifesto - 5 Minute Revolution* (2010), *Operation - For Something White and Cold* (2010) and *Operation - For the Beloved and Song* (2014) are good examples of a flashmob. What they show are the simple motions that one can easily follow, such as gymnastics, shouting slogans using a microphone, snow removing, among others. Even if manuals are given and audience participation is encouraged, their work is not about accomplishing a particular goal or creating a certain aesthetic form. Rather, these performances provide the audience with an experience of becoming ‘anybody.’ Audience is just counted as one person, rather than being treated as a special one.

In ordinary life, an experience of anybody has been oppressed as we have a number of statuses and names given by the nation, family, ethnic group and society. Okin Collective’s performances disclose this ‘anybody’ hidden in our daily lives, namely, a democratic subject in a Rancierian sense. The democratic subject means an empty place or a pure form that is not filled with certain characteristics. In this regard, it represents the subjective aspect of the common. In other words, a flashmob plays a similar role in the aspect of the subject. However, Rancière’s subject of democracy is like an empty blank; it is not premised on the abstraction, but is revealed as a concrete form. It expresses its appearance as an unnecessary redundancy under the current order (for instance, the existence of a ‘poor man’ in a republic). It is embodied as a different sentiment that invades the dominant order. There are some relevant cases of physical actions including discord and contradiction that can be observed in some contemporary performance works.

Okin Collective’s performance is often presented in the form of ‘gymnastics,’ whose goal is to promote health. Nowadays, however, the promotion of health is supposed to abide by the system instead of having a significance in itself. On one hand, improvement of health is neoliberalistic challenges of self-management and self-improvement. On the other hand, it is a duty of improving one’s physical fitness that the people need to seek as the object of state’s management. However, from the viewpoints of Negri and Hardt, the body is the foundation of social solidarity that all humans have in common, namely, ‘the common,’ before it was captured by capital and nation. Performances

by Okin Collective aim to visualize the common characteristic that the body has by creating a ‘crisis of identity.’

For instance, in *Operation - For Something Black and Hot*(2011), the movements looking like simple Gi(Chi, energy) gymnastics begin to feel somewhat awkward and uncomfortable over time. These gymnastics are created by a unique mix of the motions extracted from the disaster response manual of a local government. This hybridity has a status of ‘one more’(un-en-plus)¹¹ in a Rancièrian sense. As it were, the body produced by this performance is a kind of redundant body. The redundancy breaks up the order of the system because it cannot be counted within the existing system. But it does not mean the victory of individuality over universality. On the contrary, Rancière claims that something that is not included in redundancy, exception and calculation is an embodiment of universality. In the body which is subordinate to the system (the body as an object of private possession and public management), the ‘anybody’s body, that is, the power of separating the common body operates here. When exceptions appear, an ordinary life is suspended and the common is revealed in a place where everyday life is suspended. The common is visualized from the cracks of the juxtaposition of daily lives and disasters.

The candlelight vigil also showed the sprouting form of the second type, which is network. It can be classified into two forms. First, it is the role of a huge screen that takes up the space where the hanging paintings used to be placed in the past. The screen is a place where images and videos are played as well as a medium of ‘networked images, information and affects’ that projects the movements of protesters in real time. For example, the screens placed in Gwanghwamun Square played a role of showing not only video messages that citizens from different areas sent, or the images or performances of performers to widely scattered participants, but also the images of some demonstrators who moved towards the Blue House in real time. Second one is the citizens’ actions that diffused the candlelight vigil online by producing, sharing and transforming photographs, images and texts on the internet including social media. These acts of producing flexible movements of images, information

11 Rancière, J. *ibid.*, p.115

and signs showed the possibility of network-based political art more than any other artwork. The activities of citizens were ahead of those of professional artists. As a result, professional artists had to come up with the responses to the citizens' explosive activities.

Currently in Korea, it is not easy to find the cases of network-based political art. However, one cannot say there were none in the past. Some artists predict the future. Nam June Paik is one of them. No artist has been as pioneering as Paik in presenting a network type of work. Paik had already shown remote 'communication art' via satellites before the world wide web was invented. *Good Morning Mr. Orwell*(1984), directed by Paik who connected New York and Paris live via satellite, was broadcast in Seoul and Berlin, etc. and the show watched by around 25 million spectators was his signature work.

Paik's works are closely linked to the 'visualization of the common' even though they are not directly network-based. In the case of the gallery work using TV monitors, so-called video sculpture, it is more than the point of taking monitors as an art object. What is important is that it was an attempt to appropriate and transform TV culture. For instance, In his piece *Nixon*(1965-2002), Paik collects the clips of President Nixon's speech (from his inaugural speech to resignation address) and distributes them in two monitors. Then he distorts Nixon's face one by one by attaching magnetic coils to the screens. Paik showed a playful transformation of electronic signals while criticizing the passivity of TV culture in this work. In fact, Paik discovers the possibilities of freedom in it beyond a simple refusal or destruction of TV culture. Paik believed that large-scale broadcasting stations and state-owned broadcasting network should be the common. In other words, he discovered the potential of network immanent in the medium of video itself. His texts, especially "Global Groove and the Video Common Market,"¹² reflect his objectives well.

“Videoland’ on this spaceship Earth resembles the divided state of European countries before 1957. Many TV stations around the world are hoarding videotapes totaling thousands of hours and

12 Paik, N.J. *Du Cheval à Christo et Autres Ecrits*, eds. Decker, E. et al. trans. Lim, W.J. et al. *From Horse to Christo*. Nam June Paik Art Center. 2018, pp.276-280.

asking impossibly high prices or compliance with complicated procedures to obtain some commodity for which they have almost no prospect of selling... Should video culture stay as divided, nationalistic and, protectionistic as the block economy of the Thirties, which amplified the depression, instigated Fascism and helped promote World War II?... What we need now is a champion of free trade, who will form a Video Common Market.”¹³

It seems Paik saw video network in terms of the market only when we focus on the word ‘free trade,’ but in the following passage, Paik clearly points out that the monopoly of network is connected to political issues of information poverty and exclusivity of images.

“Most Asian faces we encounter on the American TV screen are either miserable refugees, wretched prisoners or hated dictators. But most middle-class Asians are seeing essentially the same kind of clean-cut entertainment shows on their home screens as most American Nielsen families. Did this vast information gap contribute to the slightest degree by the All-American TV screen of the Mid-West before landing in Saigon, which necessarily has all of the miseries of a war-torn country?”¹⁴

In this respect, the concept of a Video Common Market that Paik proposed can be interpreted as an attempt to liberate network from capital and state ownership, namely, at the level of internal revolution. It can be inferred from the term ‘ecology’ that Paik mentioned in the latter part of the essay. Paik states “Ecology is not ‘politics’ but a devoutful Weltanschung (worldview)”¹⁵ and “which believes in the shift of our attitude”¹⁶ while emphasizing the fact that the Video Common Market is the domain of ecology.

In No Exit: Video and the Readymade (2007), David Joselit said Paik’s work could be described as a “readymade as network.”¹⁷ In

13 *ibid.*, pp.276-277.

14 *ibid.*, pp.277-278.

15 *ibid.*, p.279.

16 *ibid.*, p.279.

17 Joselit, D. *No Exit: Video and the Readymade*, October no.119 (2007), pp.37-45.

this essay, Joselit presents three patterns of readymade arts: readymade as objet (Marcel Duchamp), readymade as act (Jasper Johns) and readymade as network (Nam June Paik). He considers these three patterns as three methods of art dealing with relations between objects and symbols. According to Joselit, Paik's work shows "an authentic mutation of readymade in which the code itself with the appearance of commercial television signal is reentered."¹⁸

What Joselit intended was to show Paik's readymade is based on a combination of the subjectivity and objectivity, a unique phenomenon in the age of media, but the expression "readymade as network" is in fact the essence of Paik's work as 'visualization of the common' beyond Joselit's intention. Readymade is not only an avant-garde symbol that transforms art into life, but also a social product, in other words, the symbol of the common. Readymade is the social in that it is a product of capitalist mass production. Besides, readymade is 'the common' (after removing its appearance of private possession) because society is essentially built on the relations between people. Paik knew that new media including television, video and satellite were, first of all, networks before being viewed as material assets. What Paik intended was to verify the fact that network had a property of 'the common' before the huge broadcasting stations, markets and state took network as their possession.