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Art as Commons, Museum as Commons

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His original name is Taiho Park. When he published *Social Structure Theory and the Methodology of Social Study and Science* in 1987, his pen name Jinkyung Lee became more famous than his original name. He entered university when the ghosts of the citizens of Kwangju were still hovering in the air, which possessed and caused him to spend his university days in the street instead of classrooms. As a result, he became a Leninist, wanting to build an 'organization of professional revolutionists.' In 1990 and 91, thanks to the sudden collapse of socialism that struck upon the socialist in prison, he saw the abyss. Since then, he has been living, thinking and writing, in pursuit of the answers to the questions that faced him at the time. The questions began from his doubt about socialism and 'modernity,' developed into an exploration of the nature of a community, and is now transforming into a deep thinking about ontology. While *Marxism and Modernity* and *The Birth of Modern Residential Space* deals with the first questions, *Communism* expresses the critical transition from the exploration of the nature of a community to ontology. *Writing Ontology of the Rebellious* was his own effort to describe his ontological thinking. Recently, he wrote *A Philosophy Class for Life*, which contains his belief in 'ethics of beyond'; *Exceptional Classics*, which is a collection of exceptional analysis of Korean classic literature; and *Philosophizing Buddhism*, which reinterprets Buddhist philosophy as modern philosophy. Now he is in a transitive phase from 'the ontology of the existing' toward 'the ontology of existence,' looking for his way again. As an effort to do so, he is preparing a book about Sijong Kim's poetry and ideas. He is an active member of 'Suyunomo 104,' an intellectual community, and professor at Seoul National University of Science and Technology.

1.

The theme of this year's symposium is to connect the concept of "commons" to the museum and to Nam June Paik. The presenters before me have discussed important issues related to the theme. For example, the observation that "the museum has now become a banal place" can lead to the idea of the crisis of the museum. Also the observation is right on target that, although there are so many museums and so many exhibitions, they have now become a place where people go "for fun" and take a picture, rather than a place where people enjoy art in serious ways. Also the concept of public ownership, which is different from that of public goods has been pointed out as well. Rather than making critical comments on the discussions that

have taken place, I would continue to add to the discussion by pushing them forward. I believe it would be more positive and productive.

I agree with the idea that we should discern the two concepts, Commons(公有) and Public(共有). I suggest, instead of using these words which sound the same (in Korean) but written in different Chinese characters, that we use the terms public goods and common goods, in order to differentiate the two concepts in an easier way. The word ‘public’ is often used in art as well. This children’s museum where we are in now, or Nam June Paik Art Center, the holder of this symposium, can be considered a public space.

When we say a place is ‘public,’ it means that it is open to whoever satisfies certain conditions. Whoever satisfies certain qualities can enter and use it. Thus it may seem to be open to everybody, but it is actually closed to those who are not qualified for the same reason. On the other hand, “to be open” here means possibilities, in other words, possibilities to use it in this or that way. So what really happens is that it becomes hollow very easily. Unless someone comes and uses it for a particular event, people might simply come, look around and leave.

Only when something is constructively used, publicness, as availability for use, can be turned into practical usability. Inversely, when something is open, that is, available for use, what is called ‘the tragedy of common goods’ often happens. In other words, when something is simply open to those who are qualified to use it, it is likely to be occupied and monopolized by those who use it most often. The well known example is the case in which the common meadow was ruined due to the users’ competitive usage. Of course, this case is quoted everywhere against the author’s intention to emphasize the necessity of socialist or public management of common goods. What is important is that we should understand that public goods either becomes hollow due to its open possibility or possessed by a few and destroyed as a result. In this sense, while the concept of common goods has created a space away from such privateness, it may still move away from it only as an abstract possibility.

Therefore I would like to examine the concept of Commonality(共同性), borrowing the word “common” from “common goods.” It should be differentiated from Publicness(公共性). I want to use

the term commonality to refer to an abstract idea of community. In order to discern the two words, I want to respell the word using a hyphen, “commun-ity.” Commonality means a certain ‘feature’ that gathers individuals into one group. In the sense that it makes the individuals move together and act together, we could also use the term commonality. The term commonality implies common sensibility generated through common activities. It is formed when individuals move together or share a rhythm which is necessary for moving together. In the sense that commonality is formed when different things move together(協) to common rhythm(調), we could use the word cooperation(協調).

Cooperation is not the same as Common features(共通性). Common features means the common property among certain individuals. For example, the audience here and I have many biological common features (共通性). Because we have not done anything together, common features between you and me may be far less than common features between me and my car. Common features between a horse and a jockey may be a better example. I may have a lot more common features with the jockey than with the horse because we are fellow human beings, but the jockey may have so much more common features with the horse than with me. When you ride a horse, you move together with the horse in oneness, and you don’t need a lot of common features in order to do so. In this sense, common features is a kind of potentiality which is formed when we move together in one rhythm, combining different elements in one.

I believe that common goods should be understood in relation to common features. We often mention knowledge, softwares, language, natural resources and so forth as the representative examples of common goods. The most important characteristic of them is, in fact, that they become common goods because people use them. Such common activities make them exist as common goods. A software, however excellent it may be, cannot be common goods unless it is used. ‘Simple’ programs such as Windows or DOS before it, became common goods simply because many people use them. Although there are many softwares, people use Windows because many people use them. How many times something is shared decides its ‘value’ as

common goods. Therefore, we can conclude that the value of common goods is judged according to how much it is shared.

Land is another example. The reason why the land near Hongik University or in the center of Seoul is expensive is because many people use it. The fact that many people use the land has decided its value. Certainly, infrastructure also matters. In order for a land to be used by many people, there ought to be roads, subways and public transportations. This infrastructure is built with the tax, which is common goods. Therefore, the value of a certain piece of land is made by the common activities and common goods.

Here I want to point out that the ‘value’ of common goods is different from the ‘price.’ The price is in the form of money to which the value generated by the public activities of sharing transformed. The producer of the value takes the money because he supposedly produced it through the activities of the public who share and use the property. The rent, which is calculated based on the price of the land, works in the same way. The legal owner of the property personally takes away what has been produced by common goods through common activities. This is, strictly speaking, an extortion by an individual of the value generated through common activities. It is a personal extortion of communal property by enclosing it, when it should be shared.

Anything of which the value is decided by common activities works in this way. Knowledge, for example, works in this way too. When we judge an academic journal or an essay, the most important criteria is how many times it has been quoted. It shows that how often something is used decides its value. In this sense, even an ‘unimportant thing’ can have great value if it is used by many people. What is unique in the concept of common goods is that even a good thing may lose its value if it is not used. Therefore the justice of common goods should be shared. Because it is made by common activities, it should belong to the community. Personal ownership should be restricted.

2.

We can apply the same approach to art. Beauty, which artists depend

on or which is created by artists, is formed through common goods, that is, common sense. It is said that an artist's personal creative sense is important in art, but I believe that such sensibility is in fact shaped and developed based on the common sense shared with others in the time and space within which one lives.

The famous book *Basic Concepts of Art History* by Heinrich Wölfflin (1864-1945), who is well known in pattern history, proves this point. In this book, he finds the common styles shared by the artists in Renaissance and Baroque period in spite of their personal differences. Even though these artists aspired to create their own individual style, not wanting to share it with others, they still shared common senses without knowing. The people of that time and their art works drew from these common senses and in this sense they are common goods. Another example is mathematical perspective in western art after the Renaissance. After 1425 when it was first used, perspective was common goods every western artist used up until impressionism. Because everybody used it, it was a common sense and the technique everyone must use in order to use art.

What is important to artists, however, is that they should not stop at using these common senses. I believe that the task of modern artists is to break away from these common goods and continue to create new common goods. It is their implicit but critical mission. The modern art in the 20th century aims to invent new senses that break the existing common senses, instead of creating art considered beautiful according to the already shared senses. By breaking conventions, it intends to provoke new ways of thinking. In this sense, we can say that modern art destroys common goods. But it does not simply destroy but creates as well. The result is that only the senses from the past are destroyed and new senses are suggested. Thus it would be fair to say that it creates new common goods. In fact, those who create new software and new style of language work in the same way.

From this point of view, let us now think about the activity to appreciate and enjoy art. If we talk about appreciating and criticising that depart from common sense and follow instead avant-gardian sensibility, which is different from 'public' possession, that is, embracing only what can be understood within the existing common

sense, these are activities to commonly possess new senses and new styles of art that break existing common sense. These are the activities to expand our senses and explore new fields. In other words, it is to build a foundation upon which new art can emerge. The new art that will make its appearance here will break itself and will become something else in an ironical way. The new sensation, which is the result of this activity, will enter the field of acceptability, finding its way into common sense. Thus we make an avant-garde sensation common goods, that is, common sense of beauty. I mentioned earlier that common features is the result of common activity. If artists' creative activity to break and move beyond the existing common sense is a personal one, the activity to possess it together and make it new common goods is a communal one: moving together in one rhythm and sharing it together. In this sense, the activity to possess and enjoy art together is to make art common goods.

3.

Let us go back to the beginning. To treat art or art museums as common goods is to form a space in which communal activities to possess and enjoy art can happen. This is the very reason why museums are absolutely necessary for art to thrive. If an art work cannot be enjoyed by people, it loses its reason for being. All art works are made or written to be read by people, even if a few.

They are meant to please and delight their audience. This is what should happen in museums: sharing of art works. In this sense, museums serve as a space where the new sensations created by artists are turned into common goods, which make museums themselves another common goods. This is not the same as to say that they are built and managed by taxes.

For this reason, museums naturally take different shapes and forms according to specific conditions of time or the conditions upon which art is created. Although there are different kinds of arts, we tend to group them under one term: art. But there are diverse forms of art within western art. In each historical period, there is a dominant style of art. This is the historical condition upon which artistic activities happen. For example, before 15th century when mathematical

perspective was invented and developed through public usage and theoretical justification, western art was 'religious.' Art at the time wanted to visualize the invisible, that is to say, to show what is called God in specific forms and shapes. What was important then was to maximize the religious feelings. Thus styles were judged and chosen accordingly for this purpose. People almost instinctively decided that the Romanesque would be good because its fortress-like dark, heavy and sturdy style was expected to engrave upon human body austere somberness. On the contrary, the Gothic style drew in splendid lights through large and colorful stained glass window and showed various images that would lead people to God's world. These styles had to justify themselves making theological argument for themselves.

On the other hand, mathematical perspective which was used by Filippo Brunelleschi, (1377~1446) and Masaccio (1401-1428) in 1425 and mathematically justified by Leon Battista Alberti(1404-1472) in 1435 was firmly established as the correct method of representation and became the basic grammar in art. The mission of art afterward was correct representation through sensuous visualization. In this sense, art now took a 'scientific style.' We tend to believe that art naturally pursues beauty but at the time it pursued (scientific) truth, which was a rare phenomenon. That artists of the time studied anatomy for correct representation directly proves this point. Similarly, impressionists pursued truth as well. The faith in science, again, ignited their new senses and styles.

In the 20th century, however, perspective representation- the 'scientific' representational style- was overturned by artists like Matisse, Picasso and Braque, science ceased to be the foundation of art. Duchamp clarified this concept. He believed that true art, including his own, should break the existing styles and concepts, and, in this sense, that artists were those who would break the artistic convention and senses. From then on, art took off from scientific foundation, transforming into a philosophical and conceptual types. When Duchamp emphasized intellectual, rather than sensual, aspects of art or when he drew ready-made goods into the realm of art, huge scandals arose. And these scandals concretized the changes in art at the time. In this type of art, what is important is a 'concept.' With the term

'concept,' I don't simply mean the central 'idea' of an art work, but how the concept actually works to break the existing boundary of art. While concept art foregrounds this purpose, it existed even before it was conceptualized. And even though 'concept art' stepped back from the front line, it still remains as a part of the foundation of art.

Even though 'concept art' is now out of fashion, 'conceptual' art is still dominant. It may be a meagre example, but recently I was asked to write an essay for an exhibition by an artist from England. I had to write only from hearing about the basic concepts of the works to be exhibited, and the usual creative process of the artist. Although I had not seen the works yet, I was able to write an essay because I had detailed explanation about the concept they were based on. And the museum and the artist loved my writing so much that I was invited to give a lecture as well. I saw the works for the first time on the day of the lecture, which made me feel a little awkward and embarrassed. I think my little happening shows that art today is standing on a philosophical and conceptual foundation. A philosopher like me can write about an art work without actually seeing the it.

The reason I am telling you this story is not to criticize today's art. There is no reason to say that scientific art is better than philosophical art, or that philosophical art is better than religious art. I am not trying to say that we need 'artistic art' either. The point I want to make is simply that we need other types of art and that we need to consider the differences between types when we create or enjoy art. For example, scientific art which is formed on the foundation of perspective gives power to those who see in distance. What is important is to observe. By seeing and observing art works, one perceives what is expressed in them. To the contrary, in philosophical and conceptual type of art, art should break people's ideas and senses, suggest new ones and thereby spark off new ways of life. From this point of view, I would argue that philosophical and conceptual art has ethical aspects in that it aims to change ethos,

In this type of art, communal activities to create communal ethos, therefore, are very important. In other words, commun-ity activities to create ethos is more important than observational activities. I believe that the increasing importance of performance in modern art

is related to this point. Even religious art, which centered on ethos unlike scientific art which emphasized observation, did not have performance-type art. Performance seems to be on the continuous line with everyday activities, in other words, a continuation of performative activities. Performance is, in fact, an activity that actually changes people's ethos through different kinds of practices that break and disturb everyday activities. In religious practice, it was necessary to teach and keep the existing ethos since most people were illiterate. Breaking or changing everyday practices should have been avoided. In our time, the opposite is required. Therefore performance art has found its role to carry out.

It certainly goes without saying that Nam June Paik's contribution in this context is revolutionary and progressive. Because modern art has moved forward by shattering the existing ethos, it is always avant-garde.

As art changes in types, the ways to create it and the ways to enjoy it change together. In order to say that the ways to enjoy art should change, we should also say that the way art museums function should change as well. Maybe observing art in distance only with eyes, without being allowed to touch even those that are meant to be touched, should change. Since such observational way to appreciate art is only suitable for the classical art from the 15th to 19th century, which I titled as scientific art. Museums of today still works this way, though. However, since the foundation of art has changed now, in other words, since philosophical and ethical type of art is dominant now, observing art in distance may be out of date, belonging in the past. Should how we enjoy art change as well since art itself has changed into something philosophical and ethical in the 20th century? Then should museums, where people enjoy art, change its ways of functioning accordingly? Shouldn't we innovate communal activities to change communality? It seems that most museums stay with the old way, forcing us to simply observe art, in continuation with the history made long ago. Maybe we can find the reason why museums have become a place to go for fun and take pictures in their outdated ways.

Of course, exhibition and observation of art are not the only things that happen in museums. For example, Nam June Paik Art

Center, beside exhibitions, hold an annual symposium and other diverse events in which people participate. Usually a symposium is for academics, but the reason Nam June Paik Art Center holds one every year is not simply to memorate and let known Nam June Paik and his contribution to art. I want to believe that the aim is to think again how people can use his art and to invent new ways of using it, and that it is another way of enjoying art. In this context, I want to suggest that Nam June Paik Art Center should make up and try all different kinds of experiments, other than symposiums, to break the existing ethos and to enjoy and possess new ethos and new sensations through communally using and possessing those that are crystalized in Nam June Paik's works. For example, I would recommend you to design performances that will change people's every day performative activities in diverse ways. These performances will be different from the avant-garde performances which are meant to draw public attention to the farthest end of newness. I hope that Nam June Paik Art Center will be a space where different ways of enjoying art are created and tried, where people will be swept away into the enchanting power of the new sensations and new ways of thinking created by artists like Nam June Paik. Thank you.

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