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Cross Talk Intermedia II

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Dear Dick:

As preparations for the festival performances continued, another process almost as complex was reaching its conclusion. Scale and comprehensiveness was enlarged for the printed programs just as it had been for the live presentations. In place of the envelopes containing separate sheets of heavy-gauge paper that she had used during the 1966-67 CROSS TALK series, Karen opted for booklets in a box. Everything remained bilingual (with two exceptions noted below) and stress was laid on informativeness. Each creator (ten Japanese and ten Americans) was allotted one page in Japanese and one in English, with a photo or diagram on each, and these materials comprised a remarkable 40-page source book. Special articles by the two principal guests, composer Mumma and filmmaker Van Der Beek, were printed as a separate pamphlet, while circuit schematics comprised another fold-out.

The style as well as the content of the twenty personal statements varied strikingly, from uncompromising technicality to metaphysical whimsy. Several were high art in themselves. Dancer Tatsumi Hijikata, who had astonished and delighted everyone with his avowed intention of including 10 elderly women, 10 workers, 6 crows, and 1 giraffe in his dance presentation, was outstanding. Yuasa and I labored hours in attempting to retain in English the original's uncanny balance.

> I promise that, in exposing the "CAW-CAW DANCE" to the public, I certainly intend to commit no fault.
>
> In thinking of an act of art - when one intends to make one - it is not impossible to expect that one could put each deed in its expected place. Moreover, the indeterminacy involved in such an act may also be placed.

> But for me this is not important. In our times this way of thinking is apt to be cheap and accompanied by a glorification of the act of art - something I have frequently seen.
>
> This seems rather low. In fact, am I so low? My projected portrait will prove it. In each moment, as I die, I must myself report such things in detail.
>
> I allow a sister of mine to live in my body. When I devote myself to making a dance composition, she tears at the darkness within me and devours it - more than she ought to. While she stands in my body, I (unexpectedly) sit down. There is, however, something more to our relationship than the fact that when I sprawl she does also.
>
> Concerning eating. It is not an act that is controlled by my desires. Then, when the desire occurs, what do I do about it? I thrust my head into the cupboard, aiming to take sudden leave of my family.
>
> In my "CAW-CAW DANCE," I have simply adopted the urgent good humor of such an artist with painful desires - avoiding, I trust, any resulting faults in the dance.

Early in the Fall, as the actual size of the festival became more clear, we decided that the printed program should be thought of not only as a guide, but as a document. I suggested approaching a few of the leading Japanese and American thinkers on new directions in art, explaining the festival's intent, and asking them to contribute comments of any sort and at any length. Akiyama and Yuasa agreed on three Japanese: critic Taro Okamoto, poet-critic Shuzo Takiguchi (mentor of the Japanese avant garde), and famed architect Kenzo Tange. I wrote to avant gardist John Cage, architect-inventor R. Buckminster Fuller, and critic-educator Peter Yates. All eventually agreed and produced materials of substantial interest. Only the Fuller confounded translation, with its "progressively comprehensive, complexedly adequate, economically exquisite, powerfully eloquent" language. If the Japanese seemed in translation noticeably more airy than the English, it was probably due not only to the traditional reticence which the Japanese feel about the expression of specifics. Little opportunity to explore the intermedia field had existed in Japan until the time of CTI. Briefly characterizing and sampling each of the articles, something of the comparative intellectual climates may be tasted.

Okamoto tendered the provocative core of his somewhat diffuse piece, "The Fate of Art," in an avowed aside:

> I have a passionate confidence that music is not something to be listened to! It should simply find its way into the ear. It would be vulgar to stop and stare in order to appreciate objects of plastic art. They are the same things one disregards in his daily life. One does not look, one does not listen. Nonetheless sensations mingle with his soul as vividly as ever. They assure his life. They ought to. Those colors and sounds which pass with the passage of time - they transform a man without his being conscious of it, and are converted into the energy of life. That which man retrieves without giving compensation is true art.

Both nostalgia and a rather tentative excitement infused his short essay. He saw the alliance of technology and art as potentially equal to an important role, that of pushing "art forward until it reaches the point at which existence and non-existence, intention and non-intention, come in contact with each other." As is the case in much translated Japanese, one is nagged by the feeling that the author has delicately stepped aside at the critical moment, graciously leaving the reader to convert veiled allusions into tangible subjects.

Takiguchi, wry and at times uncompromisingly non-rational, was represented by a tribute to Marcel Duchamp about whom he has recently written and compiled an elegant book. We spent enjoyable hours going over points in his own English translation of the original, and he would often smile shyly and remind me that the obscurity or discrepancy to which I was objecting only remained "if you insist on being rational." In fact, the essay, "A Rapid Requiem," contained the same point:

> Art is self-contradiction.
> It's the same as life.
> Duchamp was not afraid of being contradictory himself; he was indifferent.
> The ones who make a frantic effort to be consistent, the artists called Artist, the critics called Critic, etc., they are rarely aware of the inevitable contradiction and of the reality beyond it.

His affection for Duchamp as a man and as a phenomenon came through frequently: "I cannot imagine his face angry...possibly by some mistake." And it provided the backdrop against which Takiguchi viewed contemporary developments:

> Art of projection.
> Whether he utilized the classical analogy of perspective, or of the projection of objects on a wall, it still looked ironical.
> Today projection implies multiple screens.

No doubt Takiguchi finds much of today's art taking place at the cost of the non-rational "realities" which he treasures. The

majority of efforts in which new technologies are employed for aesthetic ends tend to reveal the artist's awe and fascination in the face of the new phenomena themselves. He is himself in the act of discovery, and probably not projecting the subtle sorts of fabric which are possible at a later stage in an artistic period (when materials can be taken more for granted and manipulated easily). Among creative people there is, undoubtedly, a growing disassociation with the image of the artist as purveyor of "answers" or of special points of view suitable for beneficent conference on the public.

The creator in many cases wishes to qualify as a member of his own audience, and for myvown part, I cannot see this as anything but desirable. Certainly many of the medial artists are most intent on non-rational elements - complex, almost tangible sensory involvement rather than discrete, problem-solving appreciation. The important difference between Takiguchi's non-rationality and that of today's avant garde resides, I think, in the distinction between a verbal non-rationalism, where (as in Surrealism and Dada) lively oppositions or perspectives arise from unusual superposition of words or events, and the sort of experience that - though physically specific - defies accurate description through word labels and grammatical sequences because of its unfamiliarity.

The long interview between noted architect Kenzo Tange and the irreverent, aggressive young critic Yoshiaki Tono, promised more in draft than it exhibited in final form. Recorded just after the culmination of the Tokyo University student riots, it found Tono emersed in the implications of student power and of pure (unspecific or patently impractical aims) dissent, and Tange, who is a Tokyo University professor, concerned and wary. Tono repeatedly pressed the older man for his opinions in the area of new social forms - new functions of art in technological societies - but Tange demured for the most part, and eventually cut from the manuscript all of his responses to concrete and topical questions. What remained showed more of Tono's irony than of Tange's wisdom. The most interesting exchange occurred at the end when Tono noted that

> from the viewpoint of the Zengakuren,* technology as a vehicle of information is a possession of the establishment. There is always the danger that the controller of information might become a Hitler. If artists are innocently happy about what they call new possibilities, then aren't they serving blindly the cause of the establishment?
>
> * * * * * * *
>
> There are artists who are excited by the vogue of art and technology, and take it as their slogan. They add a neon light and think it is technology. I think that there is a kind of Sentimental Technology

* A particularly active and physical leftist student organization in Japan that spearheaded most of the anti-university rioting.

> which involves adding technology rather than incorporating it. Maybe this is natural in a transitional stage.

Tange responded with a significant observation:

> We have been hearing a great deal of words like "intermedia," "intermedial," and "interdisciplinary" even in my field of city planning. Architects, economists, sociologists, and psychologists have to work together. But sociologists, administrators, and architects have a tendency to stay within their proper field. This makes me think that "interdisciplinary" is an unsuitable word. For instance, I am an architect, and I have to go beyond the preserve of architecture. This going beyond is related to some expression like "meta-disciplinary."
>
> * * * * * * *
>
> As long as an artist claims that he is a color specialist or a specialist in sound, he will not be able to make environmental art (in its two senses). This can only come about in a meta-media cooperation among artists who can transcend their disciplinary boundaries.

This theme, too, arose in the post-festival interview conducted by Ongaku Geijutsu magazine. Though the artistic collaboration and the group are becoming more rather than less common (in line with the individual artist's increasing reluctance to pose as guide or counselor to his fellows), the trend is also toward individual acquisition of technical competence in new areas. All of the guests at CROSS TALK INTERMEDIA though well past college age are engaged in studies relating to electronics, computers, perception, or film and projection techniques. They are all accustomed to interdisciplinary collaborations. Group efforts do not necessarily induce technical or aesthetic dependencies, for the individual member may be surprisingly competent in dealing with the intricacies of areas well outside the normal boundaries of his primary field. I believe that it is in these situations (collaborations of self-sufficients) that the most interesting progress is likely to occur.

Cage's piece, "Art and Technology," was in his present manner a compilation of extracts, in this case mostly from his own writing. In style, it resembled Takiguchi's fragmented poeticism. Argument - in the sense that an essayist would normally use it - was replaced by aphoristic stimulant: "The purpose of art is not separate from the purpose of technology," or a curt, "Introduce disorder." Many paragraphs appeared to come from the composer's notebook - jotted reminders like,

> Invade areas where nothing's definite (areas - micro and macro - adjacent the one we know in). It won't sound like music - serial or electronic. It'll sound like what we hear when we're not hearing music, just hearing whatever wherever we happen to be.

His concern with the uses of computers (The master American pragmatist, he constantly opens new fields - overcoming economic, social, or technical limitations by using common items from his daily life surroundings.) and his concern with communications between technicians and artists (Things, he said, dumb inanimate things, once in hand, generate thought, speech, action between artist and engineer.) are as genuine as his love. "Bewildering and productive of joy," reads a one-sentence paragraph mid-way in the article. Cage's writing reflects the optimistic, ongoing involvements of a man who has been subverting unsuspecting objects and processes to his influential aesthetic ends for over thirty years.

Dr. Fuller honored us with a major article, "The Launching of INTUITION," a collection of thoughts expressed on the occasion of the launching of his new sloop. Brimming with vitalism, he began by reminding us of our human wealth:

> God gave man a faculty
> Beyond his and other creatures'
> Magnificent physical brains -
> And that unique faculty
> Is the metaphysically operative mind.

Circling back, he gradually built a recognition of the sailing ship's special circumstance,

> ...it is visually obvious
> Even to the inexperienced viewer
> That the sailing ship is designed
> To cope with nature's
> Most formidably hostile
> Environmental conditions
> For human survival
> At the interface
> Of the ocean's and the atmosphere's
> Tumultuous ferocity.

Pointing out not only its success in dealing with its lot but the economical elegance with which success is achieved,

> And sailing ships
> Unlike bulldozers
> Do no damage to the sea, land, or sky
> While employing the windpower
> Without any depletion
> Of the vast wealth of universal energy.

And finally rising in tribute to the human capacity alluded to in the opening paragraph:

> Key to humanity's scientific discoveries, technical inventions, design conceptioning, and production realizations

Has been a phenomenon
Transcendental to humanity's
Self-disciplined
Objective concentrations of thought
And deliberate acts -
A phenomenon transcendental
To humanity's inventive capabilities.
That key is the first
And utterly unpremeditated event
In all discovery, invention, and art,
It is humanity's intuitive awareness
Of having come unwittingly upon
A heretofore unknown truth -

...And then seconds later
The intuitive awareness
Of what the conceiving individual human
Must do at once
To capture the awareness of
And secure the usefulness of
That eternally reliable principle
For all humanity.

In an extended APPENDIX, Dr. Fuller elaborated upon his concern with "accomplishing humanity's total economic success," a goal that would carry with it "the advancement of living standards/ For ever more people/ And the multiplication of their life spans/ And the multiplication of their mobility/ ..." As frequently happens after reading or talking with this man, one is both elated and dispairing, braced by the vitality and valid potential of his optimistic visions and sobered by the sad limits of one's own convictions regarding human enterprise. If the article said little directly about art and technology, it pointed out unerringly the directions in which all our efforts, technical or aesthetic, should aim. It reaffirmed the existence of and necessity for mind as well as brain.

"Thought Concerning a Rock," sober and cautionary, was almost a parable. In it, Peter Yates stated a strong and critical position, argued the import of the artist's - a man's - train of decision-making. In his garden there is a rock that he has taken

> ... from its place to an unnatural setting by considerable work of thinking art. It is itself a considerable dimension of my thought. Let no one say it could have come there by nature or accident; it could not.

"By abstraction and only so," he says, can the rock become, "in its place a work of art."

> At what moment did the rock, seen among many, unplaced, lugged up the four feet from the sidewalk, assume this positive dignity and abstract conceptual dimension?

> That began when, looking at it from several directions, touching it where it lay in mud, I saw it for what it is, this rock.

Continuing with a discussion of the artefact ("a radiation of meanings"), he observed that

> When a work of art loses its place it becomes an artefact, signifying culture.
>
> ... We see the object as esthetic, conveying the skill, the intention, the spirituality of the maker, the circumstance of his thinking action, and by these considerable distinctions we approach, we estimate, we discipline ourselves to appreciate the living mind. It is not wise to abnegate by cleverness this responsibility.

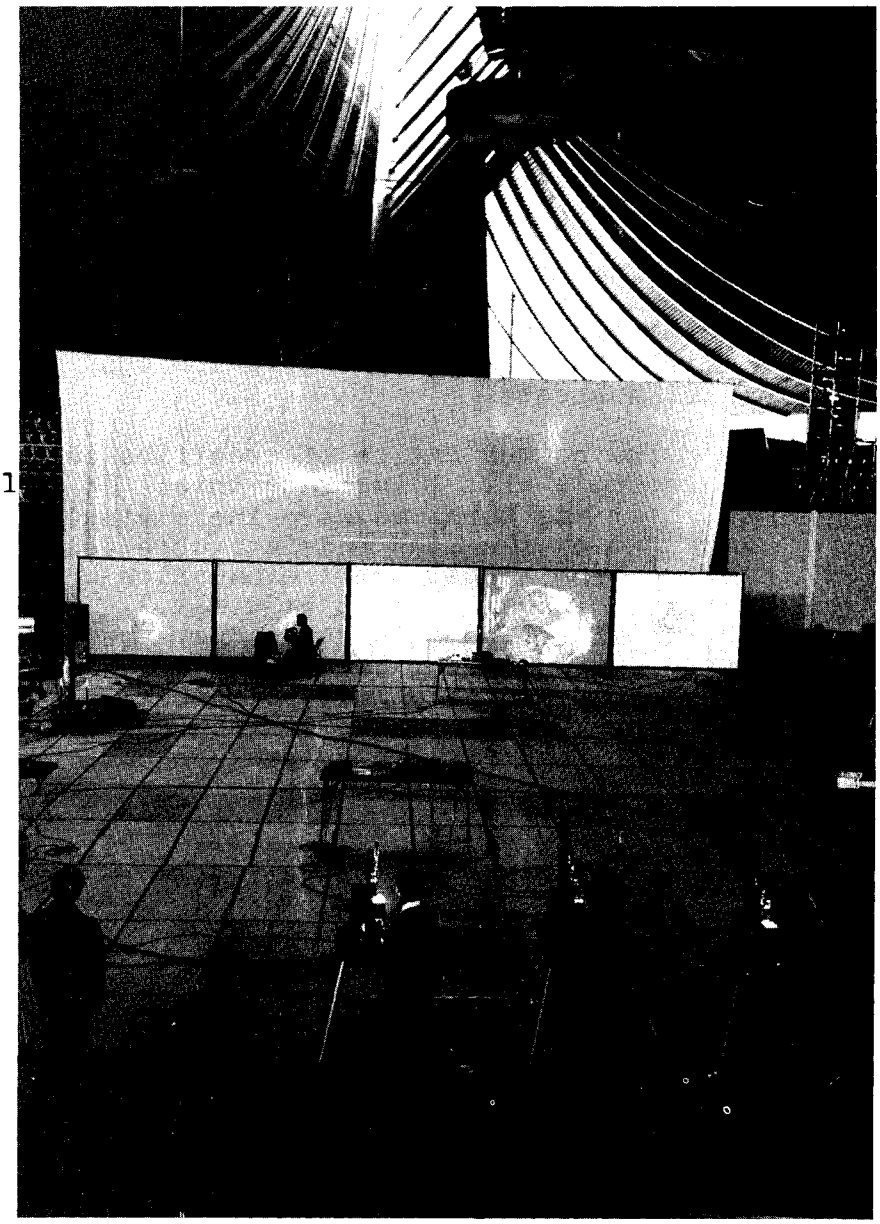
Yates' article was another instance of his importance as a critic. He has consistently worked hard at establishing alternative or supporting aesthetic positions as do the composers and artists about whom he writes. Not content with the various descriptive mannerisms in which most critics wallow, he has always tried to detect the premise of the artist's work and to respond with equal intensity. I did not see his cautionary attitude as aimed at the confluence of art and technology so much as at the quality of thoughtfulness that the contemporary crush allows.

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

Before the materials reviewed above could be assembled, we had to weather another crisis which was disturbing and prophetic. While the Americans to whom I wrote responded in relatively short order, the Japanese contributions did not appear. As publication date approached, I began discreetly to inquire about them only to discover that our collaborators had not yet mustered sufficient courage to approach their chosen contributors. This was not due to any difference in their status relative to those they had decided to approach and mine with respect to the American counterparts. It was due to the enormous social and psychological difficulties involved in the Japanese context. After these honored men were actually approached and a form of commitment had apparently been obtained, it was still necessary to work out the proper form and amount of a gratuity to each (necessarily, absurdly, to our way of thought insultingly, small), and the delicacy of pressing them on our deadline. In Japan, where the apparent tempo of life is so quick, there are "deadlines" and deadlines. The final, inflexible deadline, known as girigiri, is a fixture in the lives of every writer and composer in Japan, but in our position it would have been improprietous to try to establish one. As a result, we suffered delays, compromises, and finally received two originals and one substituion, an already published article in place of the promised new piece.

At this point, as the arrangement of materials on the three evening concerts was becoming a primary concern, it began to dawn on me that quite a number of the new works that Japanese composers had promised us the preceding summer were not materializing. Substitutions were being made at an alarming rate, and I feared that the result would be a harmful imbalance. The size and complexity of American contributions had been premised on knowledge of the Japanese potential. Having committed ourselves to performing a number of large American works, it was essential to have comparable Japanese presentations, an apparent equality between the number and the nature of the Japanese and American efforts. The precise reciprocation of courtesies is a hallmark of Japanese life, and in aiming for a very large and radically disposed audience, it was deemed important to avoid any appearance of an "American Show" with Japanese concessions. The festival was to be an accessible, bicultural stimulant rather than a packaged import.

Again, the necessity of indirectness and decorum, even between persons who know each other well, made it impossible to press too hard. We could inquire but not demand. Organizational meetings became increasingly heated. Finally, after I had compiled and presented a list that documented the high percentage of substitutions (projected live works involving new technology and performers were being replaced with tape music), the American Cultural Center translator said to me in some agitation, "Are you accusing the Japanese composers of being irresponsible?" My reflex denial of any such implication was followed without break by his response, "but they are, don't you think?"



Projectionists' rehearsal in the Tange gym.

It is difficult to say what was actually behind the rash of switches. As Yuasa and Akiyama rightly observed, the Japanese composers had considerably less experience with technical equipment than their American colleagues. I felt that such contact could have been accomplished long before, however, and that the example of certain sculptors and composers (Minoru Yoshida and Toshi Ichiyanagi, in particular) had shown this. Certainly CROSS TALK INTERMEDIA was the largest involvement with artists that Japanese industry had ever undertaken. In spite of the lack of tax benefits (and hence the absence of foundations), industry approached in the right way was willing to invest. Now, work for Expo '70 has involved virtually the entire Japanese art avant garde: composers, architects, sculptors, and film makers. Practical precedents are rarely lost on the Japanese, and it is safe to anticipate very substantial development of the art and technology combine there over the next decade.

Reticence was certainly a major factor. Doubt concerning the practicality of our grandiose plans (which from their standpoint, lacked the massive funds and organizational structure which a similar Japanese-style undertaking would require) probably affected our credibility. There are also the debilitating realities of the Japanese composer's personal economics. All in all, however, it seemed to me significant that the Americans came through to a man - not with some thing, but with the thing they had originally agreed to do. Perhaps the absence of the definite article in Japanese has more profound implications than one at first suspects.

The communication of specifics is never easy in Japan, and an anecdote will illustrate this. In the months after our first daughter was born, we were increasingly annoyed by all-night yipping from two of the most indefatigable dogs in Asia. In tandem, they barked from sunset until exhaustion and hoarseness rendered them impotent (usually about 4:30 a.m.). Our phoned efforts at involving the local police made no headway whatever, though competent English translation was available. Finally, after we rejected his "Japanese" solution, poisoning, our language teacher counselled a personal visit to the station. He explained that phoned complaints were too vague and impersonal to have any effect. We went, drank tea, drew maps to indicate relative positions (Addresses are of little practical use in Tokyo, where house numbers are bestowed more or less in order of house construction.) and tried to give proper weight to the absurdity of ten hours of nightly barking. The several officers in the hoan department seemed properly impressed, and it took several wakeful nights to convince us that there was not yet understanding on the police side. The barking continued unabated, and in desperation I recorded a full hour of it - between 2:30 and 3:30 one morning. As a next step we invited the constables to our home, served them tea and played the tape. They sat, sipped, and patiently listened to the entire hour, nodding and making notes. They thanked us, bows were exchanged, and the delegation proceeded to the offending house. Thereafter, promptly at 11:00 barking stopped not to resume until precisely 7:00 the next morning.

Discussion gradually convinced our Japanese collaborators that the situation was alarming, and steps were taken to improve program balance on the basis of previous commitments. As the guest composers arrived and set-up in the gym began, though, there was a final chapter. Dancer Hijikata, considered the top attraction of the entire festival, sent a letter to Akiyama only five days before the opening concert explaining that it would be impossible for him to dance. Our action-oriented indignancy soon gave way to dismay as the story unfolded. It was certain, we were told, from the tone of his letter that there would be no reconsideration, no negotiation. His refusal was based on the sincere conviction that the quality of his dance composition, as it developed, had not been sufficient for the occasion. He was, in all honesty, paying the festival a compliment. In spite of the crushing disappointment, and the rush of questions that flooded our minds, it took no more than an hour for full calm and acceptance to set in. This seemed to me an important indication of the "japanization" we had undergone in three years.

I have spent a good deal of space talking about the printed program materials and incidents relating to preparations because these things are far more responsive to a verbal approach than the actual events of the festival. 10,000 would be a conservative estimate of the number of photographs taken during rehearsals and performances. There were literally dozens of photographers snapping relentlessly. Japan's leading art magazine, Bijutsu Techo, devoted 26 of 38 pages in a special supplement on CTI to black and white, gravure, and colored pictures. Still, few came close to capturing the authentic atmosphere. The in-the-round setting; the particular excellence of the acoustics ("presence" without undue reverberation); the proximity of audience and performers; the medial dimension of the works, where not only sound and sight but the less easily defined sense of space-use made many of the works exhilarating if not awesome experiences. We all enjoyed the large scale and found "the roar of the crowd" a rousing contrast to the usual polite applause granted by traditional concert audiences. The response set everyone to thinking and dominated the accounts of most reviewers who had not been prepared for such virile reaction.

Sincerely,

Roger Reynolds

Received in New York on August 27, 1969.