

AFTERIMAGES

- An Installation Against Digital Culture -

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ABSTRACT

The previous generation lived in what could be called the “Television Culture,” and the next generation will live in a “Computer Culture.” My generation lives in an era between the two. Television and computer media are among the most significant inventions of what could be called the modern information system; however, we are often unaware of the effects these media have on our consciousness. *Afterimages* raises questions about the influences and effects of television and the computer on the cultures they create.

The *Afterimages* installation consists of four stacked video monitors facing a video projection screen. The video monitors represent an electronic body influenced by television images and computer images. *Afterimages* addresses invisible influences, the negative aspects of new technologies, and how they affect our minds and bodies.

PART ONE– INTRODUCTION

We expect that technology will make our life easy, but it brings us advantages and disadvantages at the same time. Today we live in an era between “Television Culture” and “Computer Culture.” I am referring to Television Culture as the period from World War II to approximately 1990, when television was the predominant worldwide media. Now we live in a mixture of Television Culture and Computer Culture.

The *Afterimages* installation raises questions about the power of these technologies to the audience. The installation consists of a projector atop four stacked monitors facing a video projection screen. The four monitors suggest a body without a face. Each monitor screens electronic images of a fragment of a body. For example, the top monitor shows the chest (Figure 13). With the projector atop the monitor sculpture acting as the body’s eyes, it projects what the figure sees which is the influence of the Television and Computer Cultures. My intent is to represent the influence of these cultures on the audience’s bodies and brains as seen in the electronic body in the monitor screens and the video images on the projection screen. The projector, acting as the body’s eye, projects afterimages of a person actively watching television. The intent of the *Afterimages* installation is not to suggest the benefit of technology, but to suggest the loss of our natural minds to technologies and machines. New technologies influence our minds slowly; we

often cannot detect the effects. *Afterimages* captures the idea that we do not easily realize these negative effects on our minds.

PART TWO - Art History Background

2-1 Pop Art

"Pop artists made their careers by putting a fresh spin on everyday items.

Andy Warhol elevated soup cans and soap pads to fine art and Roy

Lichtenstein put comic-strip illustrations in museums, right alongside the old masters."¹



Figure 1. *Marilyn* Andy Warhol, 1964
Silkscreen and oil on canvas 40 x 40 in
Leo Castelli Gallery, New York

Pop Art of the late 1950's and early 1960's is a good example of an art form that represents a fluidity of imagery between fine art and popular culture. Pop artists, such as Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein, would re-present popular cultural images in their art to exemplify the workings of the popular culture and consumer culture that predominated in the United States during the post-WWII era. For example, Warhol would silkscreen multiple images of Marilyn Monroe (Figure 1), making reference to the infinite number of

repeated, film-like reproductions of the movie star in mass media that create the power of her celebrity. Warhol similarly repeated images of commodities, like Campbell Soup cans, to refer to the dynamics of consumer culture. In the same era, Roy Lichtenstein began to use typical elements of commercial art, comics and advertisements in his drawings and painting (Figure 2).

Lichtenstein is best known for using comics as his visual language, commenting on what was often referred to as cheap, commercial, childlike and the ultimate low source for fine art.

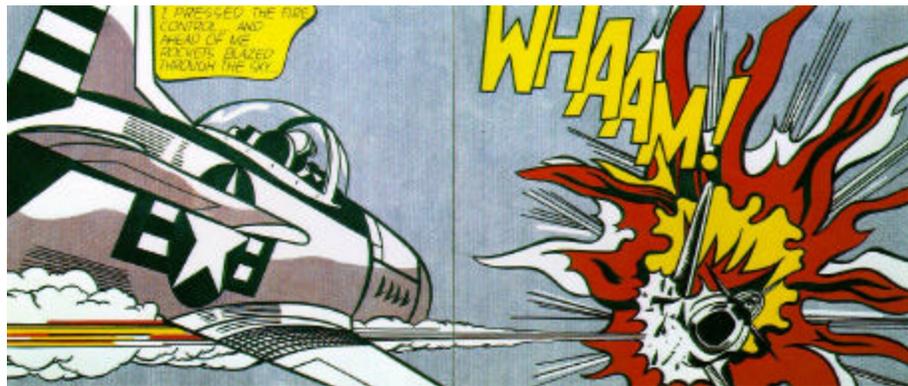


Figure 2. *Whaam!* Roy Lichtenstein, Magna on canvas 172 x 269 cm (68 x 106 in.) (Two canvasses)

The Marshall McLuhan's book, *The Medium is the Message*, dealt with the birth of a new media landscape and the mass media. He suggested that new technologies affect the culture, art and society by changing the consciousness of the people. That is to say, new technologies change the present culture, then the changed culture affects people's patterns of life. For example, when Lichtenstein exhibited his works at the Leo Castelli Gallery in 1962, his paintings shocked and excited the audience. The audience had

never seen that kind of art before and never thought that comics could be an element of art.

Pop Art is an example of an art form caused by Pop Culture. In 1960, Pop Culture spread all over the world. It influenced many areas including music, fashion, painting, and so on. Pop Art was a significantly new art form in the 1960s stemming from the new Pop Culture. Pop Art is different from previous art forms because it centers on different objects: cans, superstars, and junk-style objects from Pop Culture of the 1960's. Initially, it was shocking to audiences to see Pop Art works containing images of commodities because they thought that artworks should include images of beautiful women, fantastic scenes, serious moods, or something that they did not understand. However, audiences accepted the new art form very easily, not because Pop Art was easy or familiar to them, but because Pop Art represented the contemporary culture and life. Again, a culture exerts significant influence on artists and art.

Pop Art influenced *Afterimages* in several ways. Pop Art and Pop Culture is represented in the installation through the color scheme I chose. My intent is to represent digitally the distinctive Pop Art style of using vibrant, primary colors. Including images of Pop Art on the screen is intended to suggest Pop Art as part of the past, merging with our current Television Culture. I feel a deep appreciation and connection with Pop Art because it resonates with my culture. As our current culture evolves, I envision new art forms emerging much like Pop Art emerged from Pop Culture. Pop artists

understood their culture and then formed it into a new style of art. Similarly, computer artists need to understand modern day Computer Culture in order to be as successful in introducing a new art form to society as pop artists were in the 1960s.

2-2 The Interest in Technology by Modern Art

“When machine production was new, it gradually created an environment whose content was the old environment of agrarian life and the arts and crafts. This older environment was elevated to an art form by the new mechanical environment. The machine turned Nature into an art form. For the first time, men began to regard Nature as a source of aesthetic and spiritual values. They began to marvel that earlier ages had been so unaware of the world of Nature as Art. Each new technology creates an environment that is itself regarded as corrupt and degrading, yet the new one turns its predecessor into an art form. As our proliferating technologies have created a whole series of new environments, men have become aware of the arts as "anti-environments" or "counter-environments" that provide us with the means of perceiving the environment itself. Today technologies and their consequent environments succeed each other so rapidly that one environment makes us aware of the next. Technologies begin to perform the function of art in making us aware of the psychic and social consequences of technology.”²

- Marshall McLuhan -

Marshall McLuhan is a theorist examined the information age, global villages, the technology and power of media. McLuhan explained that the meaning of the media was the media itself. McLuhan simplified history based on succession of technologies. In *The Medium is the Message*, McLuhan also mentioned that the imaginary power of technology overcomes our understanding. McLuhan suggests that the function of art is to make tangible

and subject to scrutiny the nameless psychic dimensions of new experience. McLuhan called art an early warning system.³

The *Afterimages* installation warns the audience of technologies of the future. The *Afterimages* installation cautions the audience as to what we may encounter in the future. Now, the effects from the technology have no name, nor are the effects of our consciousness from the technology visible. Scientists may not be able to prove this, but artists can provide insight to the audience. The *Afterimages* installation is not a solution for the danger of technology, but gives a warning about the disadvantages of technology and media to the audience.

We cannot live without using technologies and media. We should accept the power of technology and media, but artists should always keep in mind the importance of consciousness and creativity. McLuhan suggested that serious artists are the only people able to encounter the technology with impunity, because they are experts aware of the changes in sensory perception. McLuhan also emphasized the importance of conquering or neutralizing mass media and technologies by artists.

Many artists have experimented with machines as artistic objects and tools. In early twentieth-century art, the anti-art of Dadaism, Constructivism, and Futurism were reacting to increasing technology in modern life. These artists had a positive view of technological advances, represented them in their art, and used new technologies for their creations. For example, Dadaists used machines as an icon in their works. Also, Dadaists designed

their ironic, irrational assemblages of machine parts and photo-collage works. The avant-garde used photographic technologies as tools for their work. Constructivists used photomechanical methods to reproduce posters.

As technologies develop, artists cannot ignore the significant effects and influences of the society and culture. Art represents the present culture and circumstance. This is one of the important contributions of art to my society. Earlier in the century, many artists tried to use mechanical means on their canvasses. For example, Cubists included the front, back, top, and sides of a subject. This is a way of seeing an object is perhaps influenced by mechanical innovation. They tried to find new ideas and creative methods for drawing using new concepts shaped by new technologies.⁴

The Russian Constructivists used machines as the subject and an instrument to create their art. Many of these artists believed that science, technology, and industry would significantly affect future societies. They used mass culture, performance, and mass production to realize their art. Constructivists used a combination of technology and art during the 1910's and 1920's, and they used new technologies, materials and techniques to realize their political ideals based on the Russian revolution.⁵

In the 1920's, many artists began to build design concepts based on industrial innovation. The Bauhaus movement played a significant role in the history of design and graphics. They emphasized the function of art as something beautiful and those visual artists brought design culture into

everyday life. Many artists tried to find new art forms and ideas based on technologies and machines.

2-3 Video Art and Television Culture

In the late 1960's and early 1970's, artists began using video as a means to create fine art. Much of this work was created as an alternative or a critique of mainstream television, which has been a powerful communications commodity since the 1940's and 1950's and which has created its own Television Culture. When the Sony Corporation introduced the portable video camera in the mid-1960's, it became an important tool for expressing a new form of art. Some artists who had great vision but lacked traditional painting and drawing skills could express their creativity with the new technology. Video art became a cutting edge art form created by the new technology.

Many artists, motivated by the impact of technologies, were very attracted to video media. Video was portable, flexible, and easy to use. Artists could explore video's capability to record and transform imagery and could combine it with other elements like sound, painting, performance, and dance. Artists could video-tape themselves and explore personal narratives and document body art. These artists also created video installations as a beginning of two-way interactive art works. Video installation allows the audience to experience and share images and space with artists, and makes them performers in the installation itself. Audience participation is an important distinguishing characteristic between the previous art and video.

Nam June Paik is perhaps the most famous video artist and is often considered to be “the father of video art.” He was one of the first video artists to successfully implement this television culture and this new technology as art. I am inspired by his success in embracing and understanding his world and technology, enabling him to creatively represent his culture in this new genre. In his piece *Tricolor Video* (Figure 3), a series of television screens flash random images of everyday events in his culture. He re-presents recognizable, some might say mundane, events through technology and brings the best of both his culture and his technology to the audience as a new art form.



Figure 3. *Tricolor Video* Nam June Paik, 1982
Centre Georges Pompidou, Germany

Teiji Furuhashi’s *Lovers*, 1994 (Figures 4 and 5) is another good example of a video artist using technology to create art. *Lovers* expands video art to include a three-dimensional immersion into the technology, as opposed to simply viewing images on creatively stacked television screens.

This installation successfully uses space, technology and the concept of the body. My work was inspired by his creative re-presentation of the body and its fusion with technology. I also admire his perspective by re-presenting the audience as performers in the installation.

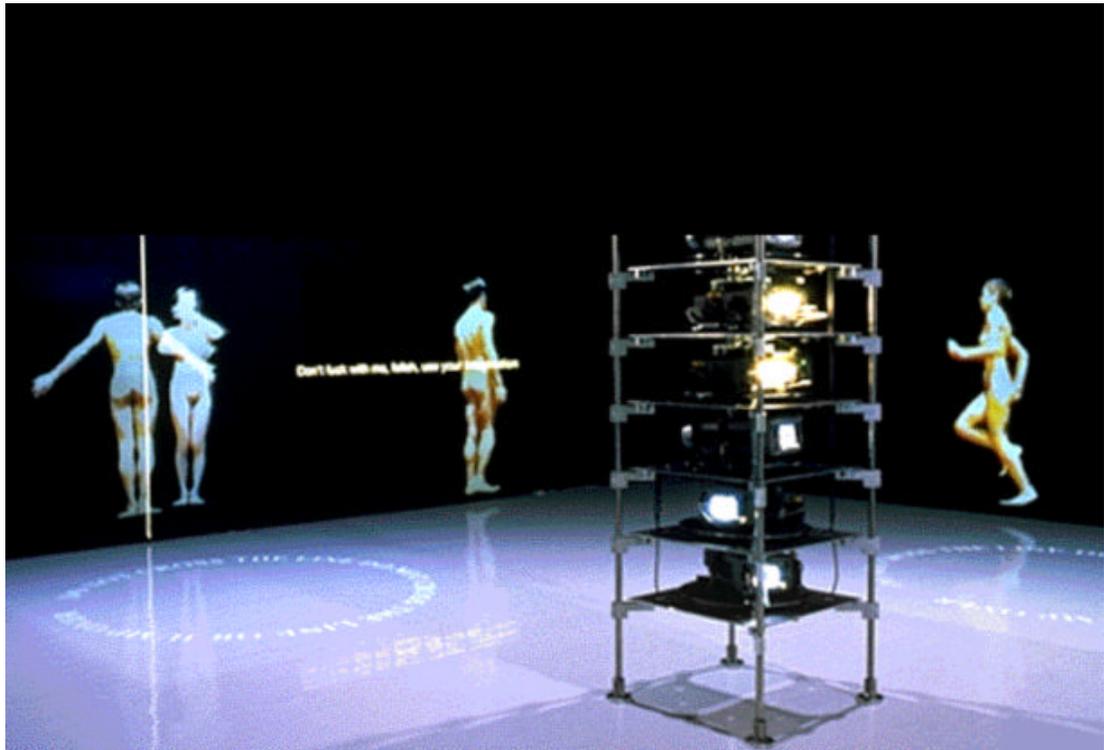


Figure 4. *Lovers* Teiji Furuhashi, 1994

I feel that video installation is an effective and powerful form of communicating and sharing space with the audience. For example, the *Afterimages* installation consists of four monitors and a projection screen creating two-way views between the different media (Figure 6). The monitors represent the futuristic Computer Culture while the projection screen represents the current Television Culture. The audience occupies the space between the two media, not only acting as the link between the two media but

defining the frame of the installation from entrance to exit as well. The audience, representing society, experiences the television and digital cultures at the same time. The installation is intended to have the audience realize its position as one of transition between the older Television Culture and new Computer Culture. I would hope the viewers would ponder the benefits and detriments of the new Computer Culture.



Figure 5. *Lovers* Teiji Furuhashi, 1994

To create a new art form, it is not enough for artists to simply understand a culture, but it is essential that they understand the technologies inherent in those cultures as well. Video artists believed that video's special properties would form the basis for a new art form. For example, many video artists were dedicated to gaining sufficient technological experience to use their tools effectively and imaginatively. As we enter the Computer Culture, we should understand the relationship between new technologies and art, because the technology successfully enables artists to create the new art forms.

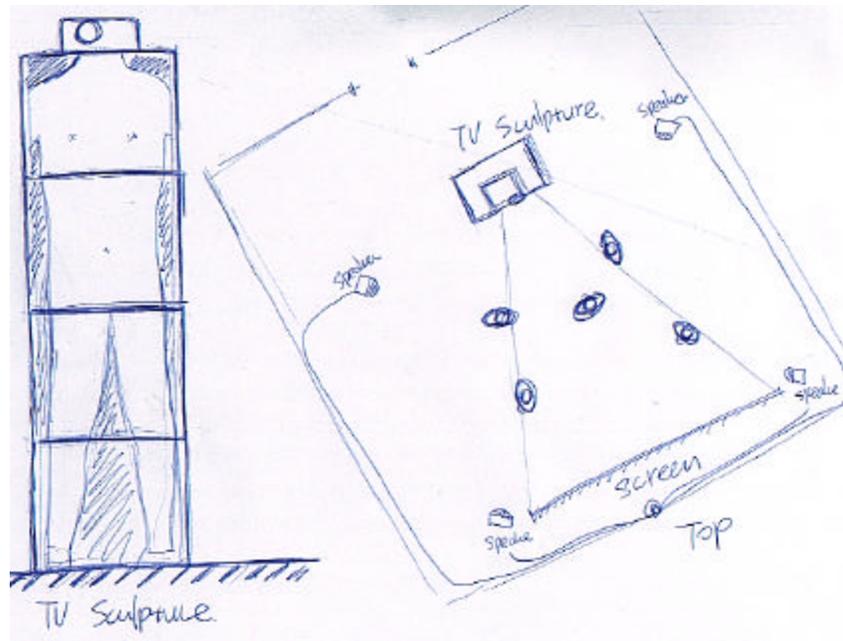


Figure 6. The idea sketches of *Afterimages*

2-4 Computer Art and Computer Culture

Since the proliferation of the personal computer in the 1990's, artists have begun to work with the computer to create a wide variety of art forms, many of which are web or multimedia based. Similar to the use of the video camera in the 1960's and 1970's, artists are using computer technology to comment on the developing Computer Culture. I am using both television and computer technology in the *Afterimages* installation and am offering a re-evaluation of culture today which I view as being between the Television Culture of the past and the Computer Culture of the future.

Today, we see the revolution of computer technology rapidly occupying the present culture, but a new revolution of art influenced by this new medium is not as widespread. It may be a revolution in the sense that many artists are

now updating old media and tools in an effort to create art, but it is not a real transformation to a new art form because we are still in transition from Television Culture. A new art form cannot be created until we are immersed in Computer Culture and can understand and appreciate that culture. There are artists, however, who are representing this changing culture and these new technologies in their work.

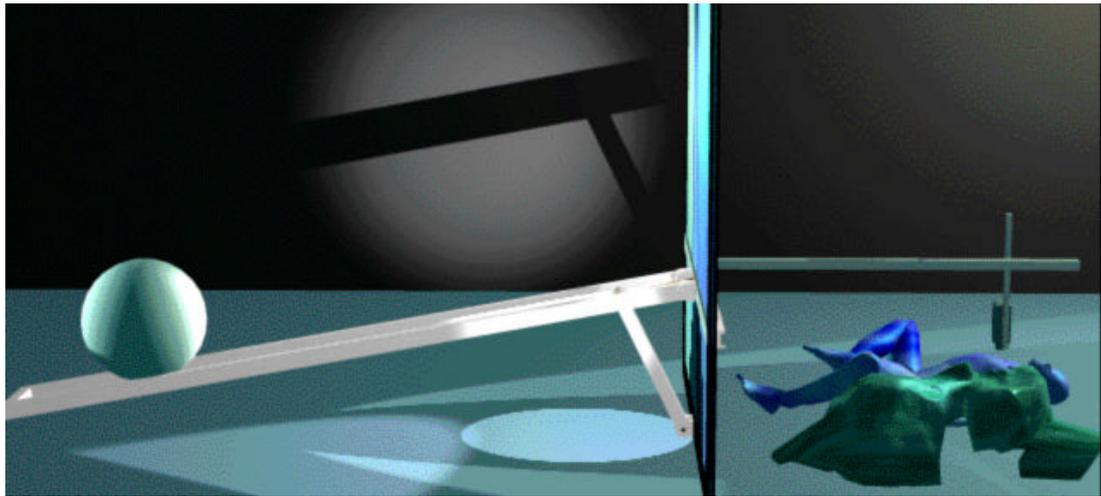


Figure 7. *Lucy and Frank* Tony Brown, 1995

3D Simulation of the installation

Today's computer artists mix old-fashioned media with the power of computer technology: for example, computer-generated images are combined with video installations and multimedia artworks incorporate traditional forms. Tony Brown's *Lucy and Frank*, 1995 (Figure 7) embodies the current generation's multimedia art. He combines video, computer-generated images and images of sculptures to successfully bridge ideas from Television Culture

and Computer Culture. Like pop and video artists of the past, he understands the present culture and reflects it in his work.

I use video and computer-generated images and the monitor-body sculpture as elements from my culture in *Afterimages*. I wanted to do more than just represent these cultures and their technologies. I wanted to show the audience what the past has given us and ask them to look toward the future. The installation combines elements from past, present and future cultures and technologies to emphasize our state of transition.

A successful computer artist must be a programmer and a technician as well as an artist. Computer artists need an in-depth understanding of hardware, software, and computer languages. Besides learning the technologies, computer artists should also understand the Computer Culture. More than anything else, today's computer artists should be trained to retain their personality, point-of-view, creativity and artistic vision that are easily lost to high-speed computer technology. A computer is a very powerful tool for artists that can change their ideas. Artists will need to retain their artistic vision and creativity in the face of highly influential computer technology as we traverse from Television Culture to Computer Culture.

The real revolution in Computer Art will take place in the future. As the next generation will live entirely in Computer Culture, they will be the ones to understand and embody the Computer Culture so essential in creating true Computer Art.

PART THREE - *Afterimages* Evaluation

3-1 Afterimages



Figure 8. *Afterimages* Chung Kyu Kim, 1998

I strongly believe that new media build new cultures and significantly affect human beings physically and mentally. Comparing the effects of old and new technology on humans, I believed that new technology is more powerful and significantly influential. It is time to move the new digital technology forward and create new art forms. Many artists are working with computers and what they call computer graphics. However, no one has perfected computer technology as an art form because the computer technology is too advanced and powerful to be controlled. Many computer artists use computers and create only beautiful computer generated images with help of the computer "brain". Present artists are having a hard time using computer media for their artistic ideas. My work is not a new art form and it is not a solution about how to use computer to bring a new form of art to life.

The *Afterimages* installation is a question and a warning to the audience. New art forms represent new cultures; many artists have developed new art forms to represent their cultures. The present generation lives between cultures, Pop or Television Culture and Computer Culture. I chose the installation form for my thesis project to interact with the audience. I find that video installation is the most powerful method to express an artist's intention and creativity to the audience. Installation requires space and a specific duration. A successful installation brings strong feelings to the audience, and creates strong reactions.

3-2 The Meaning of the Body



Figure 9. *Afterimages* Chung Kyu Kim, 1998

The concept of visual representation changed radically with the technical transformation of the image, the image apparatus, and apparative perception. The historical condition for the origin of the technical image is the

Industrial Revolution, which formulated the human body as a machine. Human perception was compared with the performance of machines, and not found as reliable, fast, or as perfect as the machine. P. M. Roget (to whom we also owe the thesaurus) discovered the persistence of vision (1824), the layers of the retina on which the afterimage is built. An obsessive metric and machine-oriented study of the human body began, leading to experimental physiology, medicine, and psychology. Psycho-physiological research on perception became the analytical model (alongside the machine) for the genesis of technical images. The laws of perception were themselves turned into mechanisms.⁶

I suggest that digital environments change our minds and bodies. The symptoms are not visible, so we do not realize the influence of the Computer Culture on our bodies and minds. Computer Culture may change our natural body to another kind of body. While the digital environment grows stronger and more powerful, it may have strange effects on our lives, our minds, and our bodies. We may ask the question, "How can the digital signals effects our bodies?" Nobody knows yet. But, we are experiences some effects, for example, when I stare at a computer screen for two hours, my eyes become tired and turn red. Of course, my eyes revert to their normal color very soon. I pose the question of whether the effects on the body and mind are good or bad. The audience will decide the answer for themselves.

3-3 Technical Methods

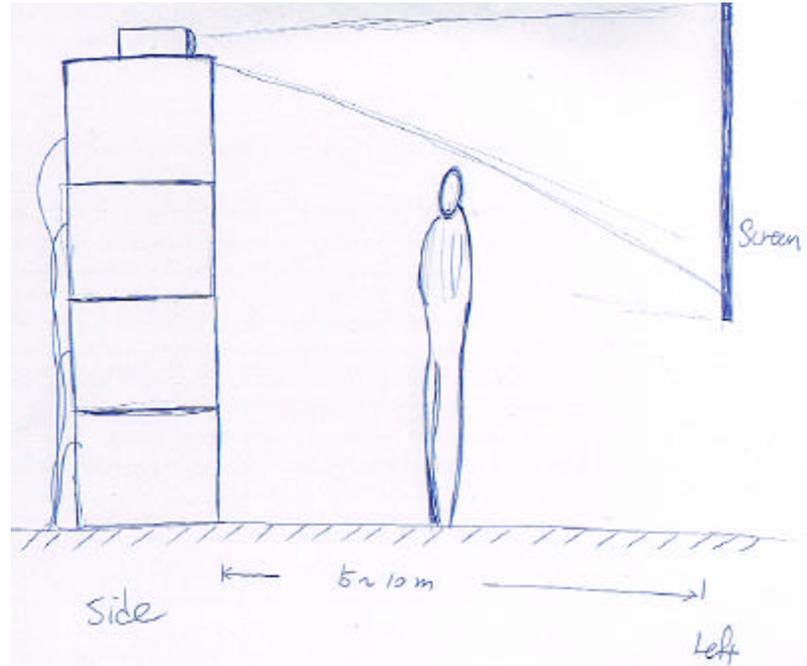


Figure 10. The idea sketches of *Afterimages*

Art begins with a thought in our mind and then, in a sense, the occupation of physical space. There is limited space on the earth, which cannot be erased or created. Virtual space, however, is a product of technology and infinitely expands our world. Virtual space is created by computer technologies and exists only in the human mind. Technology enables us to imagine that virtual space looks like real space. The *Afterimages* installation has a real space in which the audience stands and a virtual space represented by monitors in the installation. Besides the two spaces, there is another space called time space. When the audience stands between the monitor sculpture and the projector screen, it is intended that

they have a sense of standing between the previous culture and the future culture—between real space and virtual space (Figure 10).

As Computer Culture is in progress, the present generation does not understand and does not know what the effects of the new culture will be. The audience can obtain a sense of a space between two cultures in the *Afterimages* installation. If they stand in the middle of the installation, between the monitor sculpture and a projector screen, they can feel that they are between two cultures.

In *Afterimages*, I used four monitors, a projector, a projection screen, and space. I used a big room to control the space and used the four monitors to make a sculpture as a messenger for the Computer Culture. A projector and a projector screen are used as a messenger for Television Culture and Pop Culture. I put four monitors in a column in the middle of the room to symbolize a sculpture of the human body (Figure 11). The monitors represent the messages of the computer/digital images. The projector is located on the top of monitors and project Television Culture and Pop Culture video images. There is enough space for the audience to stand between the monitors and the screen. Technically, four Digital Video players and one 1/4-inch player were used to play four Digital Videos and one 1/4-inch tape. Each Digital Video was played on each monitor and the 1/4-inch tape was projected from the projector. The Digital Videos were about thirty minutes long and the 1/4-inch tape was about one hour long. Two speakers were also used to play the sound/music I composed on the 1/4-inch tape.

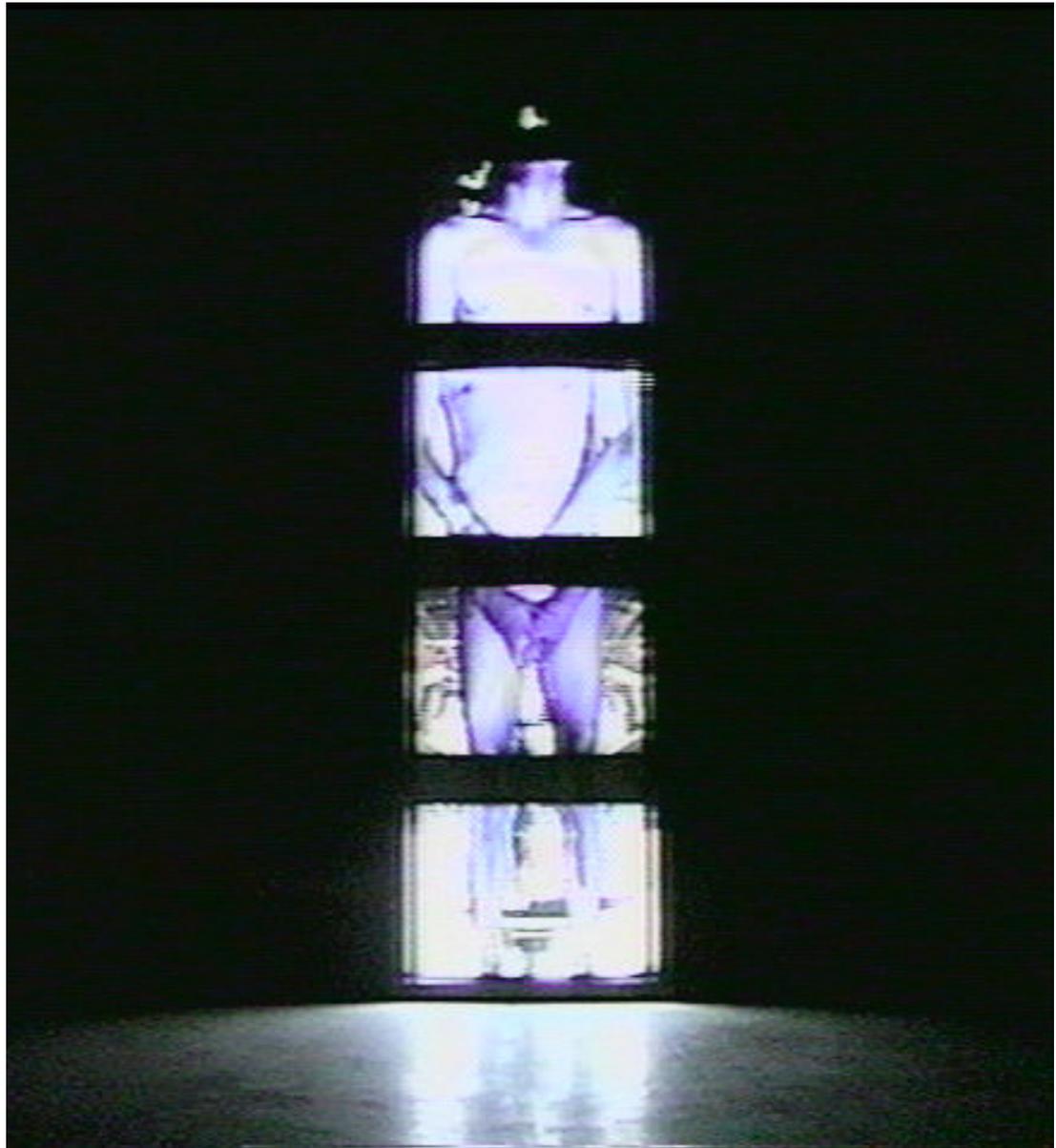


Figure 11. The Television Sculpture of *Afterimages*

When people are addicted to watching television, they may feel something is wrong with their bodies and brains. They may feel that television changes their organic rhythm and the patterns of their lives. In *Afterimage* installation the audience sees an image of a man on the screen images from

the projector. I present him as a representative person of the Television Culture. The image is of a man actually watching a television, and the angle of camera captures his face, eyes, ears, head, and so on. Television images are superimposed on his face and on the background, so the audience can see television images on his skin and melting into the background. His face and body are intended to represent nature or the nature body. But, when he is watching television and this technology affects his body and brain. I am presenting a vision of the way he does not know what the effect is and he does not know whether it is good or bad. He only thinks of having fun watching a television. The influence of technology is invisible, so I am trying to show it to the audience. The images of a projector screen can not judge whether the influence of the technology is good or bad. The audience must make the judgement of whether the influence is positive or negative.

I used the face of a person, segmented and scratched with television images (Figure 12). The colors of the images change constantly, from red to yellow and from yellow to green. The segmented and scratched images and colors suggest the influence of television, which is now an old-fashioned technology. The image of the projector screen is based on Television Culture and Pop Culture. For the segmented and scratched video images, I collected drama, news, movies, and so on. I segmented the images and gave scratched effects to the images. The segmented and scratched images are intended to the influence of television on our brain, which is very slow. As I continuously change from one color to another, the audience can imagine

something is happening in front of a television. The projected images on the screen are based on Television Culture and Pop Culture, so I want to let the audience feel that the person in the projection screen mirrors their own body and brain.

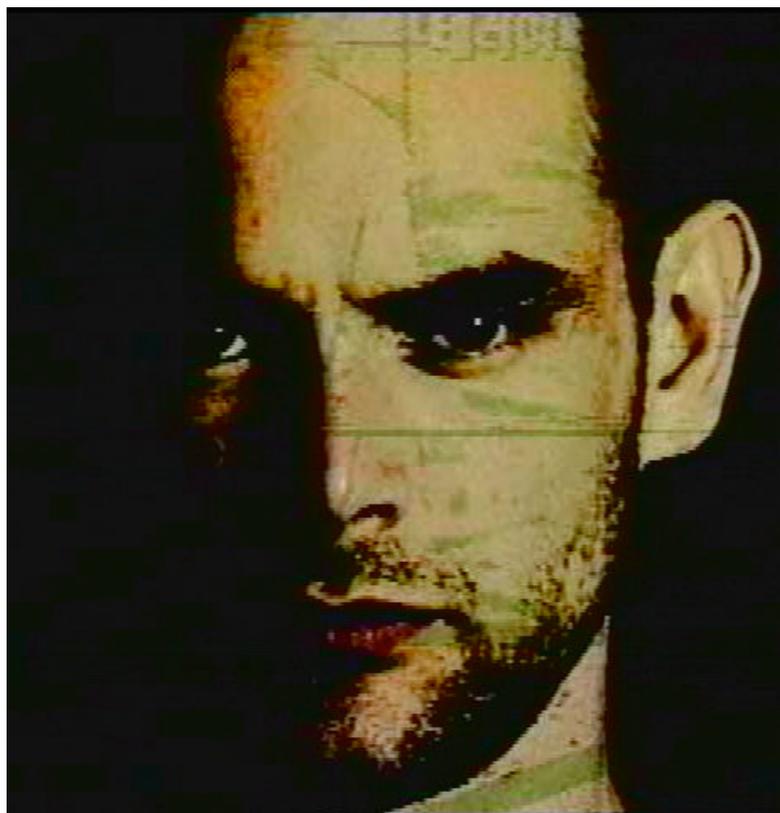


Figure 12. *Afterimages* Chung Kyu Kim, 1998

The four-monitor sculpture has a whole body without the head. Each monitor has a neck, chest, stomach, upper legs, lower legs and feet from the top to the bottom. I put the monitors in a column, so the audience can see a full body on the monitor screen. I used the naked body to suggest nature and serve as the subject of the *Afterimage* installation. The projector atop the

monitors is the eye of the sculpture. The projector works as a connection between the sculpture and the screen.

I put images inside the body and the background in the sculpture. The images consist of computer generated images, some wire models, pictures of bodies, and so on. I mixed digital images and natural images to suggest the digital effects on our bodies and environments. The images are overlapped and edited into a fast-paced montage. There are three frames on the screen simultaneously, so the audience cannot easily recognize what they are, but they can feel that those images present a kind of Computer Culture.

When I shot the naked body, I put a green screen behind the body and projected two videos on the body and background. One projector was aimed toward the left side of the body, and the other projector was aimed toward the right side of the body. The video images of one projector have war images because the army has advanced most technology. The other video has also war images and some computer generated images. However, they are also hard to recognize by the audience. These create a sense of inexact images from technology. They look like random images, but I presume that the audience will make the connection with other images of the sculpture and the screen.

Afterimages is about one hour long. The body stays on screen for the entire hour, but the background changes on the screen. The installation was too long to be controlled, so I needed to do something to capture the audience for an hour. To solve the problem, I prepared three (approximately

three minutes) digital works and put them in the second monitor, the chest part. The three works last about three minutes each, and I put them in every fifteen minutes. It gave some diversity to the installation. Also, in the last five minutes, all the video images are black and white. The black and white video images show that the effects of Computer Culture change our body and mind in the end.

Space is a very important element in the *Afterimages* installation. The monitor sculpture has one space and the screen has another space standing opposite of the sculpture. The space between the sculpture and the screen is a hybrid space and the space is the only place where the audience stands. The hybrid space suggests a state between two cultures experienced by the audience. It is also the place where the present generation lives.

To compose music and sound, I collected natural sounds and digital sounds. I chose natural sound clips which represent nature and I chose digital sounds, which represent mechanical and technical sound. The two sound sources were composed using Pro Tools software. Before I put sound clips into the Pro Tools, I used special effects on the clips. I tried to make them sync to video images from the projector and matched it with the transitions of the projector video images.

PART FOUR–Conclusion



Figure 13. *Afterimages* Chung Kyu Kim, 1998

Some people may fear digital technology because the technology will affect our natural minds and thoughts. We often cannot feel the effects of the technology on our spirituality because the effects are slow and drawn out over a long period. The issue of this relationship between people and computer technology exists only in the present generation. As we are in transition between two cultures—not immersed in either Television or Computer Culture—the present generation can recognize problems as digital technology infiltrates our world. The *Afterimages* installation suggests the invisible effects from digital and television technologies, as well as providing commentary on the art produced from our transitional culture.

Whether good or bad, the effects of technology on the ensuing Computer Culture will redefine concepts of creativity and art. As seen in the

emergence of Pop and Video Art from their cultures, a Computer Culture will undoubtedly produce its own Computer Art. In fact, digital technology will not be seen as harmful to the next generation. Instead, the next generation will be more accepting of new technologies as their world becomes inundated with them. Furthermore, they will think and create all matters including art using new, creative technological methods.

Technology will shape art in our society; therefore, the future artist must be both a technician and an artist. Although artists may feel apprehensive about using computers for their art, many artists already use computers and television to create art; in fact, not using a computer for art may seem alien in the future. To be good computer artists, individuals should master the technologies first, then learn how to create art. (In truth, mastering some graphic software is much easier than mastering oil painting.)

Technology has historically saved much time and labor for people; however, it can potentially take away creativity from artists. Creativity has been regarded as the fundamental power of artists since the Stone Age. Technology and creativity can co-exist, but it is up to the artist to use technology creatively, and they should not pass off technology as creativity. The *Afterimages* installation serves as a warning to all people, including artists, to beware of careless use of technology as we embark on a Computer Culture.

NOTES

¹ Biedny, David and Moody, Nathan. "Pop art." *MacUser*, September 1997, pp. 54-55.

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³ Doug Hall and Sally Jo Fifer, ed. In *Illuminating Video*. Aperture Foundation, Inc.1990, pp. 47-48.

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⁶ Weibe, Peter "The World as Interface." In *Electronic Culture*. Aperture Foundation, Inc.1996, pp.339.

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