

**A STUDY ON THE VISUAL
COMMUNICATION IN THE ELECTRONICALLY NETWORKED SOCIETY
KABAKOV's "Album" and MIYAMAE's "Kamishibai"**

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The purpose of this study is to investigate the mode of visual communication in the electronically networked society, referring to the works of two artists: Ilya KABAKOV (1933-) from Russia, and MIYAMAE Masaki (1957-2000) from Japan. While not directly related to Media Art or Electronic Art, there is commonness between their visual images and cyberspace.

KABAKOV's "Album"

The ARPAnet, which is the original Internet, was put into action in the end of the 1960s. Since the first node for that computer network was set in UCLA, the net grew rapidly during the 70s. We can say that the electronic network age began at that time. In the art scene of those days, we know well the "Art & Technology" movement. And it was also during the early 70s, before Perestroika in the USSR, that KABAKOV produced and performed a series of works he called "Album". "Album" was a stack of thick cardboards displaying drawings and text, performed by showing one by one while reading the text before a small audience. I only point out a few aspects about "Album." KABAKOV used a flat material as a support to make "Album." Each flat cardboard is an independent artwork without bound, but the artist says that he can also imagine another scenes, which precede or follow it. This means that there exists a story in "Album", and the story progresses as the artist shows the drawings. It is not to say that his works are visual, but we can recognize that the text supplements or excludes the visual expression.

Kamishibai and "Album"

I introduce Kamishibai, which MIYAMAE, a Japanese artist, used late in his life. Kamishibai is a medium specific to Japan, in which a story is read dramatically while a series of pictures illustrate its scenes. We can find its origin in "Genji Monogatari Emaki", which illustrates the early 11th century Japanese classic roman "Genji Monogatari." After a long history, Kamishibai was established as a medium in the early Showa Era, around 1930, and it was used a sort of spectacle to sell candies and cookies to the children on the street. I notice the similarity between Kamishibai and KABAKOV's "Album". First, both are composed of independent drawings, which combine to make a story. So the story progresses by showing drawings one by one. Secondary, both use not only visual expression but also text.

MIYAMAE's "Kamishibai" performance

MIYAMAE began his career as an artist in the early 80s, often using electronic media such as video and computer, unlike the low-tech KABAKOV. Though MIYAMAE was conscious of the context of Art & Technology, he didn't enter into the field of Media Art. Now we review his "Kamishibai" performance. He said that it was only in the opening of his solo exhibition, held from 7 to 25 January 1997 in Galleria Finarte, that he did his "Kamishibai" performance in the exhibition space, though he actually performed it in his studio and other spaces from the middle of the 90s. He tried at least two experiments using the old medium of "Kamishibai." In one he shuffled drawing papers at random, and so tried to de-construct his original story. In another he appointed one viewers to perform the "Kamishibai", intending to invert the usual relation between performer and viewer. Thus, MIYAMAE made trials more than 20 years after KABAKOV's "Album" using a similar medium.

Metaphor of cyberspace

Mosaic was developed as a network hypertext viewer in 1993, and Yahoo was founded in 1994. MIYAMAE's "Kamishibai" was performed just around the time when people were accepting the new reality of electronical networking into their daily life. As MIYAMAE said that he used Kamishibai as an analog a of cyberspace viewer, his performance can be considered to correspond with the new mode of story and interactivity. Logically we can imagine infinite dimensions in cyberspace. But actually most windows on the internet have less than 3 dimensions. Cyberspace can be thought as a stack of 2D views sequenced by hyper links. In this sense, the visual image of cyberspace resembles that of "Album" and "Kamishibai".

Conclusion

In this paper, I considered the similarity of KABAKOV's "Album" and MIYAMAE's "Kamishibai." Then I noticed that the time when they were produced corresponds with the years when electronically networked society was founded and became popular, and that the visual image of "Album" and "Kamishibai" resembles that of cyberspace. There we can see one mode of visual communication reflected in the electronically networked society.

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