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‘Cavalcade of Intellectuals’: On Temporal Conflation and Spatial Connectedness, and on Being Political

Colophon

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Welcome to ‘Cavalcade of Intellectuals,’ a transatlantic forum for the exchange of advanced concepts, with our regular panelists, Susan Sontag and Michel Foucault. Substituting for our regular panelists today are Leslie Fuller in Paris and Mitchell Kriegman in New York.

From Nam June Paik’s *Good Morning Mr. Orwell*

On 1 January 1984, when the future that George Orwell had anticipated in his novel *1984* became the present, Paik staged what was at once an exhibition of avant-garde art and a show of popular entertainment. Titled *Good Morning Mr. Orwell* this satellite live broadcast connecting up New York and Paris started with the music video of Laurie Anderson and Peter Gabriel and a live concert of Sapho, and then what these were interestingly followed by was an interlude *Cavalcade of Intellectuals*. The panel members of this forum-like program are Susan Sontag and Michel Foucault, the narrator says, although they did not actually make an appearance in the

Seong Eun Kim | Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art

Seong Eun Kim obtained a DPhil from the University of Oxford in 2009, for her thesis on artists’ interventions in ‘universal’ museums. An anthropologist specializing in museology and contemporary art, Kim’s areas of research interest include the intersection of the artist’s, the curator’s and the anthropologist’s practices, the material agency of media art, and the sensorial experiences in museums. She curates exhibitions, academic programs, and different transmedia and transdisciplinary events in museums such as: *Transmitted Live: Nam June Paik Resounds, Nostalgia is an Extended Feedback, Musically Yours, 1963-2013*. Among her publications are “Man-Machine-Nature, from Critique to Composition,” “Intermedia, Interscience” and “Building up an Academic Discipline on Material Assemblages.” Having worked in Nam June Paik Art Center from 2011 to 2014, Kim now works in Leeum.

show, replaced by those who once worked for the comedy show Saturday Night Live. Why did Paik refer to Sontag and Foucault, if only their names?

In her writing *Happening: An Art of Radical Juxtaposition* in the seminal 1966 publication *Against Interpretation*, Sontag made a comment on happening art by Allen Kaprow and other artists in the 1950s; in *On Photography* published in 1977 she described video's potential for self-surveillance; and in *SeOUL NYmAX: A Multi-Media Arts Festival* held in Anthology Film Archives in 1994, she joined Jonas Mekas, Vytautas Landsbergis and Paik for a conversation 'On Liberation, Arts & Cultural Imperialism.'¹ Coming down to Foucault, he developed such concepts as panopticon and heterotopia, with his publications *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and *Discipline and Punish*, which are centered around two axes, i.e., knowledge and power. This became strata of many discourses on media and information society later. Foucault and Paik were bracketed in Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991). Architecture theorist Sanford Kwinter explaining about modernity drawing on the notion of 'event' and 'field' beyond absolute time and fixed space, by exploring the works of Einstein, Boccioni, Sant'Elia, Bergson and Kafka, criticizes Jameson for not freeing his discussion on Foucault and Paik entirely from the subject-object binarity.²

Contrary to expectations, however, watching *Good Morning Mr. Orwell*, you would shortly realize that all these references were only speculations. The dialogue between Fuller and Kriegman began with the statements that human intimacy is being destroyed by television technology and that intimacy is "dependent as they are upon cultural trends in aesthetics and normally, in theory and in practice." Before long this was sidetracked into a comic mingle-mangle of slipping TV technology and human relationship.

"You were only half right." *Good Morning Mr. Orwell* was a kind of arena where Paik and Orwell, the two intellectuals entered debates with each other. It seems Paik wanted to talk back to Orwell: we have a world, rather different from what you foresaw. At the intersection and divergence of the works of Paik and Orwell, nonetheless, both of whom deeply thought about the society and the future, emerge a series of compelling issues which go beyond the mere confrontation between 'dystopian' and 'utopian' world views. This is something to concern not only the two, and

¹
Published in *SeOUL NYmAX 97: A Multi-Media Arts Festival* catalogue, New York: Anthology Film Archives, 1997: "But the fact that this mass culture, of which Bob Dylan may be the high end, can be found in the living rooms and bedrooms and cellars of oppressed people all over the world, doesn't make them free. There is also the tyranny of a culture that makes people ashamed of being serious – that severs the links between their consciousness and their lives, which makes seriousness possible."

²
Sanford Kwinter, *Architectures of Time: Toward a Theory of the Event in Modernist Culture*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002, p.98.

which is more than a confrontation. Thirty years after 1984, what has changed and what has remained? To pose these questions, Nam June Paik Art Center opened up *Paik-Orwell Club: Warez Academy* in 2014. The term ‘warez academy’ is derived from a title of Paik’s sculptural work. It takes the form of an old-fashioned one-room schoolhouse, but its contents are very futuristic. The outer surface of this construction is enveloped by hard covers which span the broad scope of subjects from sociology to politics to psychology. Inside the room, such a variety of images as president Bush, AIDS, $E=MC^2$ are flashed across television monitors. The term ‘warez’ is a leetspeak meaning an illegal distribution of copyrighted files and softwares. Using the internet slang for his work, Paik represents the traditional way of education and communication reborn via cutting-edge technology, and different aspects of contemporary society transformed by technological developments in the deluge of information. Like this work of Paik’s, *Paik-Orwell Club: Warez Academy* sought to discuss Orwell’s, Paik’s and our own days together.

When imagining Paik and Orwell facing each other, the question would immediately strike you whose prediction has turned out right, that is, to weigh them against each other as media prophets in such opposing perspectives: whether to see technology as a means of oppression and domination, or as an instrument of liberation and cultural conveniences; whether artistic forms can incubate social consciousness, or any political attitudes of artists end up being reduced to an artistic experiment. Orwell was a writer, critic and journalist, and to trace his life and philosophy embodied in his works from the perspectives of humanities and social sciences is naturally led to questions as to what political awareness of artists is like and what political art looks like. Tom Boland, borrowing René Girard’s notion of imitation, argues that Orwell’s *1984* is a work of political anthropology about critique.³ At the cusp of the Second World War, Orwell was acutely aware of “the tendency of the English to vaunt themselves as democratic and therefore morally distinct from the Nazis whilst retaining a vast non-democratic overseas Empire.” Through the character Winston Smith, he intended to imply what is to critique social power on the level of an individual subject, according to Boland. The critique is operative in mode of ‘imitating’ power, and it emerges in the

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Tom Boland, “Critique as Imitative Rivalry: George Orwell as Political Anthropologist,” *International Political Anthropology*, 1(1), 2008, pp.77-91.

process of disfiguring the power and transfiguring the subject him/herself. The subject is constituted by critique.

What if Paik's *Good Morning Mr. Orwell* is seen from this angle of political critique? Satellite projects for Paik were to unroll a stage where those who were separated in different parts of the globe could get connected and communicate better with each other. He was not ignorant that the TV medium was repressive, eating up your brain, but nonetheless he envisaged a possibility to "punch a hole in the Iron Curtain"⁴ via broadcast signals giving out liberating information across borders. In *Good Morning Mr. Orwell* which seems to be a festival of getting together by means of satellite TV put to good use, however, there are sequences disfiguring the very power of technology. Technological malfunctioning, uneven editing, sequences that are not really threaded into causal relationships, and commotion and confusion caused by a commingling of a reality mediated and represented by images on the one hand, and a reality perceived as actual and usual on the other. The awkward moments where technology believed to seamlessly make the whole world one family is found to produce the situation that the seams come to be ripped out.

In the flow of endlessly pouring electronic information, everything seems fragmented into bits and bytes, small and large images on screens, which are turned into excessive neural stimuli of digitality, we are living on the surface of the fragments as if floating or drifting over them. Media theorist Franco Bifo Berardi states that everything in this age contains certain rhapsodic character, gathering disparate elements and integrating them into a single complete entity.⁵ Berardi adds that, in the affective formation of rhapsody characterized by instability, a new zone of solidarity should be found in poetry, which cannot be decoded by political and economic languages. Paik's *Good Morning Mr. Orwell* includes *Do the Meditation Rock* performance where beat poet Allen Ginsberg is singing a tune which sounds like lyrical verses, and Peter Orlovsky is practising meditation.

When thoughts catch up
But your breath goes on
You don't have to drop

⁴
Grace Glueck, "A Video Artist Disputes Orwell's '1984' version of TV," *The New York Times*, 1 January 1984.

⁵
Berardi explains that rhapsody originates in the Greek word 'rhaptein' to stitch, to string, and 'oidia' a song, a poem. Franco "Bifo" Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody: Semiocapitalism and the Pathologies of Post-Alpha Generation*, Erik Empson & Stephen Shukaitis, ed., Arianna Bove, et al., trans., London: Minor Compositions, 2009, p.125.

Your nuclear bomb
If you see a vision come
Say hello goodbye
Play it dumb
With an empty eye
If you see a holocaust
Just pay no mind
[...]
If you sit for an hour
Or a minute every day
You can tell the superpower
To sit the same way
You can tell the superpower
To watch and to wait
To stop and meditate

Who is the 'superpower'? It used to mean an influential country with a dominant position in international relations, but this has expanded to indicate 'Big Brother' in different appearances in the decentralized, deterritorialized world, and in the neoliberal market economy. In Paik's *Good Morning Mr. Orwell*, there are inserted scenes in which video artist Teddy Dibble enacting Big Brother in a rather humorous way, and staring at the spectator: a television, an object of spectatorship, is watching you back. Big Brother was a character described in Orwell's 1984 as an authoritarian power to watch and control the society, and has become a common noun symbolizing a surveillance society. Alongside technological developments, the master-servant relationship of surveillance came to bear mutants: we are living constantly under the eyes of different Big Brothers while we are living as Big Brothers ourselves towards somebody else. Big Brother is a totalitarian regulating system evoking fear, but at the same time it is one of the amusing communication forms based on a global network.⁶ On the one hand, we are outraged at the news that Google does scan all emails of its subscribers according to its terms and conditions, and are observing the 'cyber exile' phenomenon in the fear of overhearing and inspection of mobile communications at the heart of the media environment of Korea

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Norbert Bolz, *Das kontrollierte Chaos: Vom Humanismus zur Medienwirklichkeit*, Düsseldorf u.a.: Econ, 1994, Jongseok Yoon, trans., Seoul: Moonye Publishing, 2000, p.37.

in 2014. On the other, we entertain ourselves by watching the lives of other people through the reality TV show Big Brother, and want to share part of private spheres of others through various SNS channels. We are faced with different dimensions of *Big Brother* in everyday life while we are taking the role of Big Brother ourselves without much hesitation. In today's digital panopticon where multiple layers are intertwined, Winston Smith and Edward Snowden come to stand next to each other, although they are from different ages, and you will realize that you are also standing next to them.

Locating his work at the intersection of art and communication, Paik did not see only the bright future when curating and staging *Good Morning Mr. Orwell*, and was deeply concerned with how to instantaneously manage various nations in the satellite broadcast, and how to deal with discrepancies in common sense, problems caused by prejudices and cultural differences. Thirty years later, movement and migration are now becoming widespread and telecommunications technologies are advancing more rapidly than ever. Satellite broadcasts have changed our perception of the world and the changing consciousness about the spatiotemporal distance has also exploded cultural topography, causing diverse cross-cultural interactions to be sought after. However, we are today still left with the questions posed by Paik, knowing that the adjective 'global' does not necessarily indicate an ideal world of 'global village,' that this ideal is not easy to reach, almost unattainable, in political, economic and socio-cultural terms. Technology-driven capitalism is producing not only physical, geographical refugees but also economic, cultural and psychological refugees. Furthermore, mobile devices like smartphones equipped with a satellite navigation system, or GPS(Global Positioning System), are becoming increasingly ubiquitous such that they are almost like our body parts. A sense of physical distance between different parts of the globe is decreasing, and a dimension of virtuality is added to the politics of here and there. The tension between near and far away is totally gone, redistributing itself in a very different way.

In *The Gutenberg Galaxy* where the term 'global village' was used for the first time, Marshall McLuhan put forth another term 'retribalization.'⁷ Having been confined to print media, humankind came to reopen the ears as well as the eyes by modern electronic media like TV, restoring the

⁷
Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962, reprinted in 2011.

balance between sensory organs. To regain the capacity of tribal societies leading oral culture through holistic sensorial experiences could retribalize the world into a single global village. In addition to such organic groups as families and relatives organized by kinship, and such social groups as countries and companies, newly emerging autonomous virtual groups like internet communities could be classified as tribes today. The internet digital media with the tremendous power of dissemination significantly reduces the gap between senders and receivers of information who are physically separated. This has an effect of recovering a sense of bodily participation of primitive tribes. Exploring the correlations between four potential sources of power, namely, nomadic mobility, control over territory, ownership over commodities and mastery over knowledge, Pierre Lévy offers a compelling vision of what he calls 'cosmopedia,' the deterritorialized knowledge space realized by the ability of web networks to facilitate rapid many-to-many communications: "no one knows everything, everyone knows something, all knowledge resides in humanity."⁸

More fully realizing the potentials of the new media environment, in terms of horizontal communications distributing information to different places at the same time, recording and archiving information to communicate along the vertical timeline, and instruments that make these real, it seems everyone is writing and accumulating their own histories. The desire for historicization which used to be the monopoly of those in power became democratized. You are producing a huge mass of documentation on your daily lives, in the forms of text, photos and videos, on facebook, twitter, instagram and YouTube. These technologies rearrange spatial axes to reduce and remove a sense of distance, and result in tangled and superimposed time parameters. A story does not necessarily operate in a linear way, and different periods of time calling for and conflicting with each other compose the polyphony of history on the network. It is hence performative and creative to record and preserve the past, to create knowledge about the past.

Whereas we believe that interactions are limitless more than ever, transcending spatiotemporal constraints in a great measure, and thereby seek for communication and communion, we also witness social isolation and materialism and our sense of what is public and what is private is

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Pierre Lévy, *Collective Intelligence: Mankind's Emerging World in Cyberspace*, New York: Plenum Trade, 1997, p.20.

increasingly being challenged in a large database-like world. Dreaming of a telematic society in which we are willing to acknowledge others and to open ourselves for the symphony of dialogues,⁹ we often find ourselves plunged into a frightening suspicion whether we are fettered by the strikingly cutting-edge technologies behind which there are far more sweeping and far more sophisticated systems of control. In what you feel you are interactive with, you might be in fact just reactive to the system. All of us have a digital double, the online version of ourselves, and we willingly place private data in the public domain by posting on social media sites. The personal data is used by various interested parties to survey us, to track our everyday lives. The industry of wearable technology and internet of things such as Google Glass and IBM Smart Planet, which corporate giants are rushing into, leads our life world into a more meticulous system of surveillance such that our life is ceaselessly occupied by political and commercial intentions. A new dictator would not give you orders, but he would look like a butler, bringing whatever you want ready for you.

How should we fight back against the superpower of technology, the 'butler' of technology? Perhaps one of the ways to do so is to realign technology and to intervene with technology so that the capital that plays a leading role in the operation of superpower could lose its force. Technology is fundamentally open for re-appropriation and it is precisely this characteristic that makes it political and makes it possible to conceive political intervention on a technological level.¹⁰ Through his literary achievements Orwell made up a critical frame of thinking and practice in relation to technological societies. Paik re-appropriated new media of technology by which he intervened in the very media. In the age of mobile internet, to shed new light on Paik's intervention, in which he re-aligned the mass media of television artistically, it seems the notion of 'multitude' is useful. The multitude, presented in *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Grammar of the Multitude* by Paolo Virno, and *The Murmuring of the Artistic Multitude: Global Art, Memory and Post-Fordism* by Pascal Gilen, is defined as someone, different from the masses suggesting consumers for mass-produced commodities, and also different from the people who have an indivisible relation to a modern nation state. The diversity and

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Vilém Flusser, *Lob der Oberflächlichkeit: Für eine Phänomenologie der Medien*, Bensheim: Bollmann, 1993, Seongjae Kim, trans., Seoul: Communication Books, 2004, p.232.

¹⁰
For example, Social Innovation Camp, founded in London in 2008, is a project inspired by hackers' methodology of creating new programs from existing codes, to prototype parts of a new society in the shell of the old. Mercedes Bunz, "Technology as Political Intervention," in Dominik Landwehr, ed., *Political Interventions Edition Digital Culture 1*, Basel: Migros-Kulturprozent Christoph Merian Verlag, 2014, pp.193-196.

heterogeneity of the multitude cannot be reduced to the unity of the people and the uniformity of the masses, and the constantly produced internal differences of the multitude are a driving force of its way of being. They are active subjects constituting communal life through voluntary communications, admitting each other's identities first and then merging different interests.

As a bodily gesture to break through a limited radius of life, the politics of the multitude might face skepticism that it cannot escape the control of technological empire in the end. The multitude under the wielding of huge power of institutions seems to have no other way than murmuring between their teeth without being able to speak out any meaning. Gielen, however, argues that the mutter difficult to hear and understand can be a strategy to resist the enormous body of meanings established by superpowers.¹¹ If reminded that the original Greek word 'mormurein' means fizzing or vitalistic sparkling, couldn't it be more realistic in this age of vociferous politics to think about changes by murmuring voices of the multitude put together? Not following a single universal model, collective and dispersed artistic intellectuals form the multitude and their commonality and singularity compensate each other, from which an autonomous and inexhaustible murmuring comes up. The murmuring is not political activism but biopolitics from below, the politics that is reconstructed on the level of life. Wouldn't this be the way to make a new political project more likely to become a reality, if unpredictable?

Art, the paradigm of freedom and heterogeneity, can save a society that otherwise would collapse in entropic inertia. Artistic and political activities are not disparate realms but a single integral assemblage cut across by the same issues, and thus politics is transversal to artistic orders.¹² The influence of important technological changes is not solely technological but something to prompt us to revisit the whole world from a different perspective. In this regard, political art is not the kind of art that contains political issues, but the one that tracks technological tendencies emerging in the present tense and taps into the indications of consequent changes with an artistic coefficient.

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Pascal Gielen, *The Murmuring of the Artistic Multitude: Global Art, Memory and Post-Fordism*, Antennae Series No.3, Amsterdam: Valiz, 2009, pp.15-17.

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Maurizio Lazzarato, "Art, Work and Politics in Disciplinary Societies and Societies of Security," in Éric Alliez and Peter Osborne, eds., *Spheres of Action: Art and Politics*, London: Tate, 2013, pp.87-97.

Flying birds
Excellent birds
Watch them fly, there they go
Falling snow
Excellent snow
Here it comes. watch it fall

Long words
Excellent words
I can hear them now

This is the picture, this is the picture
This is the picture, this is the picture

I'm sitting by the window
Watching the snow fall
I'm looking out
And I'm moving, turning in time
Catching up. moving in
Jump up! I can land on my feet. look out!

This is the picture, this is the picture
This is the picture, this is the picture

The picture is not a window on the wall, not the window that separates observing space and represented space, thereby keeping an object of artistic activities at a distance. It was said that art is a window onto the world. Now art is a door to the world. A society today is forged by technology, and hence it cannot be someone else's business but your own. This is why Paik encouraged us to jump in.

Instead of great ideologies, Orwell believed in the values of freedom and communication of the multitude of ordinary people and the moral power to embody these. Paik performed the role of an artist as a social antenna to detect the coming changes to a society by means of media available to anyone. Both were 'political' artists, who never ceased to cast

an acute glance at and to make an incisive comment on different relations of the world. On the artistic soil that the two artists cultivated, *Paik-Orwell Club: Warez Academy* explored broader contexts and underlying matters of Orwell's 1984 and Paik's *Good Morning Mr. Orwell*, and their implications and ramifications today. The discussions taking place here were like virtual debates moderated by Paik and Orwell with the panelists – the authors in this publication. "Video can be comparable to the best of the printed media, and can be just as influential. After all, it was 300 years between the invention of the printing press and Shakespeare. Give us a little time."¹³ It is after 30 years, not 300 years, that Paik has proved what he said. To let the future talk about the present means that communities formed by the life of the artistic multitude could never give up murmuring about optimism or pessimism about the future to cherish a hope so that the murmuring from within adds up to the force transforming social grounds. This is the way to take over Paik's challenge to and dialogue with Orwell. ∞

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Glueck, op.cit.

백-오웰 클럽: 와레즈 아카데미
Paik-Orwell Club: Warez Academy



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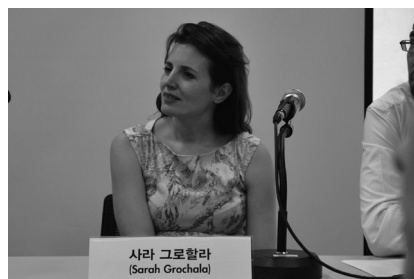
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