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# Video Tape Analysis: *Good Morning Mr. Orwell*

## Colophon

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# Good Morning Mr. Orwell: Video Tape' Analysis

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*Good Morning Mr. Orwell* (1984) was the first of Nam June Paik's satellite project series and broadcast live across the world, linking New York, Paris and San Francisco at noon on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1984 New York time. *Good Morning Mr. Orwell* consisted of 22 sequences in total, connecting WNET studio in New York and Le Centre George Pompidou in Paris. Satellite techniques were utilized to edit various components and include them in one program: live performances of artists including Laurie Anderson, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Allen Ginsberg, Joseph Beuys, Takehisa Kosugi, Yasunao Tone, Charlotte Moorman, Peter Orlovsky; live performances of popular artists such as Sapho, Thompson Twins, Oingo Boingo, Mitchell Kriegman, Urban Sax; a pre-produced video footages of Salvador Dali, Mauricio Kagel, Piazzola, Yves Montand, Peter Gabriel; and computer graphic art works of John Sanborn and Dean Winkler. As Nam June Paik put it, *Good Morning Mr. Orwell* was created as an interactive satellite cultural program in this ORWELLIAN year.<sup>2</sup> It was aired for about an hour via the PBS network in the U.S. and the FR3 broadcast network in France. It did not take the general simultaneous broadcasting method, which was to edit the linked contents in real time at the main control room and air the united version. WNET<sup>3</sup> and FR3 edited contents in their own different ways. The New York live version, broadcast through the PBS network, was transmitted to North and South America, some regions of Canada and Asia. The Paris live version, televised through the FR3 network, was sent to France, Germany and some parts of Europe. It is estimated that about 33 million people watched this broadcast.<sup>4</sup>

There have been attempts to create art works using satellite technologies since the 1970s, but Nam June Paik was the first to plan intercontinental live satellite broadcast sent via broadcast networks. For him, live broadcast was a tool to effectively show interactive communication. Also, satellite technology could provide an opportunity for people to meet when it was difficult to bring them to one place.

An important event takes place only at once. [...] The meeting of person and person, of person and specific era are often said to take place “one meeting – one life,” but the bundle of segments of this existence (if segments can come in bundles) has grown much thicker because of the satellite.<sup>5</sup>

As such, Nam June Paik wanted to arrange the meeting of a lifetime via satellites. He could bring John Cage and Joseph Beuys to one stage by utilizing satellite technology, and have Beuys and Allen Ginsberg who had much in common<sup>6</sup> meet with each other in the same program. These meetings were organized through broadcasting, hence remaining as a record.

Nam June Paik wrote the draft scenario for the live satellite broadcasting in May 1983. At noon 1 January, 1984 in New York, 9 a.m. in San Francisco and 6 p.m. in Paris and Cologne, the broadcast would begin with performances of popular singers in the U.S., France and Germany. Singers of the three groups would hold a joint performance, followed by main live performances by artists such as Allen Ginsberg, Joseph Beuys and Merce Cunningham. Writers including Susan Sontag, Simone de Beauvoir and Gunter Grass would have discussions against the background of pre-recorded footages such as local architectures and old films. During the broadcasting, satellite signal transmission problems would be caused, and traditional folk performances of each country who broadcast in live would be shown while signals are not smoothly transmitted. Young artists would then have live performances, and all performers would appear again at the

<sup>1</sup> Nam June Paik's 'video art' can be divided into video installations, video sculptures and video tapes. Video tapes herein refer to videos that can be used as sources for sculptures and installations, or can be played by themselves. Regarding the division of Nam June Paik's video art, please refer to: Wulf Herzogenrath, "The anti-technological technology of Nam June Paik's Robots," in Nam June Paik, et al. eds., *Nam June Paik: Video Works, 1963-88*, (London: Hayward Gallery, 1988); Edith Decker-Phillips, *Paik Video*, (New York: Barrytown, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Nam June Paik, Appendix 1 "The First Script, 1983 May" in DAAD Galerie ed., *Art for 25 million*, Berlin: DAAD Galerie, 1984, unpagued.

<sup>3</sup> NET is a major channel of PBS, the American public broadcast television network, and provides signals to New Jersey, Newark, and New York metropolitan regions. It uses channel 13, hence called WNET Channel 13.

<sup>4</sup> DAAD Galerie ed. *Art for 25 million people*, Berlin: DAAD Galerie, 1984, unpagued.

<sup>5</sup> Nam June Paik, "La Vie, Satellites, One Meeting – One Life," in Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum ed., *Mostly Video*, Tokyo: Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, 1984, pp.12-13.

<sup>6</sup> Nam June Paik, *ibid.*

end to make a finale. This broadcast would be produced by adopting editing techniques, devised by fellow artists such as Shirley Clark and Kit Galloway to utilize satellites. This scenario of live broadcasting from three studios is changed to include New Delhi, India instead of Germany at the end of that year. John Cage and Merce Cunningham would show performances in India. Robert Rauschenberg, Allen Ginsberg, Dick Cavett, Norman Mailer, Charlotte Moorman and Laurie Anderson would play performances, host a program, and have discussions in New York. Joseph Beuys, Jean Tinguely, Niki de Saint-Phalle, Pierre Restany and Leon Zitrone would be on live broadcasting in Paris. Also, pre-recorded videos including Robert Rauschenberg's Chinese video, Yves Montand's chanson video, Jean-Louis Barrault's video, Mauricio Kagel's narration video, Karlheinz Stockhausen's music and Philip Glass and John Sanborn's music video would be played. Live performances of pop singers in India, the U.S. and France, and their joint performance via satellites would be included.

These two drafts, planned until the end of 1983, were amended in large part for the actual broadcasting. New York, Paris, and San Francisco are linked, about half of the estimated people participate in the live broadcast, and only some of pre-recorded videos are actually used. Hosts are George Plimpton at the WNET studio in New York and Claude Villers at Le Centre George Pompidou in Paris. A computer graphic is used as an opening without prior explanation about George Orwell and 1984 in the U.S. where George Orwell's 1984 is relatively well known. In Paris, Claude Villers explains the intention of *Good Morning Mr. Orwell* and George Orwell before the beginning of the broadcast. The opening performance is *This is the Picture* by Peter Gabriel and Laurie Anderson. This performance video is pre-recorded for *Good Morning Mr. Orwell*. Two performers dance against the blue screen, and shadows and graphic background are composed later. After the opening performance, hosts in New York and Paris come up and greet viewers. Either one of the hosts occupies the full screen or the screen is split in two for each host. In the split screen, hosts in Paris and New York propose a toast and say hello to each other as if they were in the same place. In the next sequence, Sapho's *Bonjour Monsieur Orwell*, performing at the forum of Le Centre George Pompidou in Paris, is transmitted to New York and Paris at the same time. In New York, the performance video of Sapho is mixed with dark screen repeatedly at first as if the signal is not received well. After the signal is stabilized, the cross-cut video of Sapho's performance and the pre-recorded break dance are broadcast with the sound of Sapho's

ongoing performance in the background. Meanwhile, Sapho's performance is shown in full screen in Paris. After Sapho's performance, a conte of 'Big Brother' enacted by Teddy Dibble shot at the New York studio is simultaneously transmitted to New York and Paris in full screen for 12 seconds. The brief appearance of 'Big Brother' is followed by *Cavalcade of Intellectuals*, a transatlantic discussion segment. Mitchell Kriegman in New York and Leslie Fuller in Paris have discussions on the left and on the right side of the split screen respectively. The screen is split into two in New York, while the screen is split into three in Paris as the New York's split screen is placed on the left side and Leslie Fuller's screen is on the right. This discussion set up a situation where the satellite signal is not well transmitted, but ironically the signal is actually unstable. So the screen from New York shows uneven colors. After the discussion, the signal from San Francisco is sent to New York and Paris at the same time, and Oingo Boingo's *Wake Up! (It's 1984)* is aired. The live performance in San Francisco is combined with computer graphic background produced by John Sanborn and Dean Winkler, intersected with the fashion show at Studio Berço in Paris and transmitted in a split screen. Paris puts more emphasis on the fashion show than New York does. The following sequence 9 mainly consists of the sound performance by John Cage, Takehisa Kosugi and Yasunao Tone in New York, and the performance by Joseph Beuys in Paris. Joseph Beuys plays the performance with his family and two Turkish pianists, using pianos as props. Sequence 9 shows New York and Paris performance videos in the screen split vertically and horizontally, so that viewers could feel as if Beuys and Cage transcend the space and have a joint performance. The performance lasts for two minutes and the screen switches to the firework performance held outside of Le Centre George Pompidou.

Until sequence 10, New York and Paris aptly receive the live signal from each other and show the same composition. After that, Paris focuses on the live performance at Le Centre George Pompidou, causing discrepancies in contents between New York and Paris. The beginning of sequence 11 is *The Language of the Future*, a narration performance of Laurie Anderson at the New York studio. While this performance is sent in full screen from the start to the end in New York, Anderson's performance is aired for one-and-a-half minutes and then the firework performance at Le Centre George Pompidou and the performance of Urban Sax are edited together and transmitted in Paris. In sequence 12, the pre-recorded chanson music video of Yves Montand and the graffiti performance video sent from Le Centre George Pompidou are edited and

broadcast in New York. Meanwhile, the video of Claude Villers explaining George Orwell and 1984, and the graffiti performance at Le Centre George Pompidou are aired in Paris. After the Yves Montand video, a 15-second 'Big Brother' conte is broadcast in New York, while a video of Joseph Beuys preparing for a performance is transmitted instead of the conte in Paris. Then, *Future Trousers of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* of Joseph Beuys, and the edited video of the ongoing Urban Sax performance and the firework performance outside Le Centre George Pompidou are aired in Paris. During this time in New York, the pre-produced video work of John Sanborn and Dean Winkler, *Act III*, is broadcast, followed by the Urban Sax performance video received from Paris and the pre-recorded break dance video that are edited via split screen and cross-cut. *Future Trousers of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* of Joseph Beuys is aired only in Paris, while *Act III* broadcasts only in New York.

The following sequence shows the feedback effect generated by satellites. *Space Yodel*, which shows sound feedback, and *Space Feedback* by Merce Cunningham are aired in New York and Paris. Merce Cunningham starts to dance against a blank background which is composed with several images by using chroma key techniques. The background changes from a color television screen whose scanning lines are manipulated to Salvador Dali's narration, and again to Piazzola's performance. Cunningham's dance shows the feedback effect caused by time difference in satellite signal transmission.

*Hold Me Now* of Thompson Twins, a popular American pop group, is televised in New York, while *Tam Tam*, the second performance of Sapho, is aired in Paris. Each video is overlapped with the ongoing fashion show at Studio Berço, and aired in a split screen. *Tam Tam* video in Paris is halted and edited via feedback and split effects before it is overlaid with the fashion show image. The last 'Big Brother' conte is aired, then the edited version of *Do The Meditation Rock!* of the Allen Ginsberg Band and *Future Trousers of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* of Joseph Beuys is transmitted. In New York, Ginsberg's performance is the main source of the screen, while in Paris, Joseph Beuys' performance is the main and Ginsberg's performance is overlaid in a small screen. Ginsberg's performance is edited by overlapping the live video taken on the spot and the pre-recorded Asian Buddhism image, creating a single scene. After Ginsberg's performance, Claude Villers, the host in Paris, moves to the outside of Le Centre George Pompidou and provides further explanation about the theme of 1984. By that time at New York studio, George Plimpton and Charlotte Moorman start an interview for the TV *Cello* performance. While they are holding an interview against the blank

background of the studio, the figure of Plimpton and Moorman or the video of Beuys in Paris is composed in the background via chroma key techniques. Their interview and Moorman's performance are sent to and aired in Paris as well. Moorman's performance video and Beuys' ongoing performance at Le Centre George Pompidou are broadcast together in a split screen in Paris. In New York, chroma key techniques are utilized to insert Moorman's performance which is edited through satellite feedback effect in the background.

The finale in New York is *Feeding Them Raspberries to Grow* of Peter Orlovsky played by the Ginsberg Band, while Claude Villers' farewell greeting, the firework performance, Urban Sax's performance, and graffiti performance are edited into one screen and marked the ending in Paris. As the ending credit is going up, videos of live performers including Charlotte Moorman, Thompson Twins and the Allen Ginsberg Band, and the pre-recorded break dance video are broadcast in one screen split into four parts in New York, while the edited video arranged for the finale performance is still aired in Paris. The total live broadcasting time is longer in Paris as 60 minutes and 10 seconds, than in New York, which is 58 minutes and 4 seconds. In Paris, the broadcast starts 55 seconds earlier to explain the program and the ending sequence lasts about 1 minute longer than in New York.

In January 1984, Nam June Paik and Paul Garrin<sup>7</sup> reorganized the live broadcast and edited the video in a new way to produce two different versions of *Good Morning Mr. Orwell*. One of the edited versions, consisting of 25 sequences in total which lasts 48 minutes and 15 seconds long, was produced on January 19<sup>th</sup>, 1984 as 'Revise Version.' The other is 'Post Production Version,' consisting of 28 sequences in total which is 38 minutes long. 'Revise Version' used the live broadcast segments as original source with little additional editing and just rearranged the order and length of sequences. 'Post Production Version' edited the live broadcast video using various techniques and changed the order and length of original segments. The second version was edited in Nam June Paik's own way and distributed as a single channel work not as a record of live satellite show.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Paul Garrin is a New York-based media artist. He worked as Nam June Paik's assistant from 1982 to 1996.

<sup>8</sup> EAI ([www.eai.org](http://www.eai.org)) in the U.S. officially distributes the 38-minute long Post Production Version as Nam June Paik's *Good Morning Mr. Orwell*.

The original plan of *Good Morning Mr. Orwell* was partly modified and the proposed editing and effects on the spot were not realized because of the schedules of participating artists, regulations of hosting broadcasting stations, and limited techniques in use for live video transmission via satellites. On the live broadcasting day, January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1984, Nam June Paik was at the site in Paris. Paik might have probably considered from the beginning that the live broadcast via satellites could be different from the plan. Choices were made at every moment to properly mix signals from New York and Paris on the spot and to insert the feedback effects which were possible only via satellites, and these were in line with Nam June Paik's working style. He wanted to provide opportunities for people, who couldn't meet each other before, to meet through satellites; mix high-end art and popular art in one program; and enable people around the world to watch televisions to experience a media collage where video and music were merged. That is why he resolutely pushed forward the *Good Morning Mr. Orwell* project, which could have seemed to be reckless. He traveled between the U.S. and France in the second half of 1983 to negotiate with broadcasting stations, cast performers, arrange the order of performances by artists and pop musicians, and study possible satellite techniques. In the end, he managed to greet people around the world on the first day of the famous Orwell's year through live broadcasting.

Since *Good Morning Mr. Orwell*, Paik performed two different satellite projects with the interval of two years. He gradually made up for shortcomings of the first project, planned and shared the satellite works produced in his own ways. This happened every two years as if the Altair and the Vega meet once a year. If satellites generally stand for communication and techniques, for Paik, satellites seem to symbolize promising, meeting, and sharing. *Good Morning Mr. Orwell* was the beginning to show meeting and sharing that Paik wanted to share with the world. ∞