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The User-Audience¹ in the Post-Media Age: At the Level of Tactility and Brain

Colophon

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The satellite will accidentally and inevitably produce unexpected meetings of person and will enrich the synapses between the brain cells of mankind. —Nam June Paik²

Nam June Paik's satellite project *Good Morning Mr. Orwell* (1984) was a live broadcast linking New York, Paris, and San Francisco, in celebration of a new year. This almost one-hour festive parade, consisting of various dances, such as street and contemporary dances, rock 'n roll, contemporary music, and performances, also included a segment called "Cavalcade of Intellectuals," a TV debate program-like performance. The performers, Mitchell Kriegman and Leslie Fuller, played the roles of young male and female panelists, each representing New York and Paris. They are supposed to discuss the destruction of intimacy due to TV and start to talk by reconsidering from various angles what intimacy means to humans, only to be disrupted by jamming signals. In this public situation, suspended by the signal interference, the performers vehemently showed private emotions, crying that "what matters is not the program but you!" Though they did not give voice to the issues they were dealing with, one can guess what the topic was: love, or something regarding attraction, connection, and touch. This happening, performed by the two would-be substitutes for Susan Sontag and Michel Foucault, who were said to be the frequent panelists, show that this satellite project focused not on intelligence or reason but emotion and sensation.

In this way, some of the earliest significant artistic examples of network technology in the 1980s, including Paik's works, envisaged that users from all over the world would meet one another and exchange emotions and feelings using communication technology. Unlike automation technologies over the past few centuries, such as Wolfgang von Kempelen's Automaton Chess Player in the 18th century, Alan Turing's chess computer program in 1950, the chess match of IBM's Deep Blue vs. Russian chess grandmaster Garry Kasparov in 1997, and the game of AlphaGo vs. Lee Sedol in 2006, they represented a path of another direction, or a kind of utopian view of the world, pursuing collective interaction. This early vision is about largest-scale groups and the largest-scale contact occurring across them, made possible through network technologies. Then, in this present non-contact situation under the COVID-19 pandemic, what insight these examples can provide us?

Participation and Tactility in Visual Mass Media

The realization of group contact, which resulted in Paik's satellite art project, was an important and consistent goal running through his art. One can find this even in Paik's early piece titled *Symphony for 20 Rooms* (1961), in which the audience was free to wander and choose between different sources of sound, making sound with musical instruments as they pleased.³ This also continued to play an outstanding role in his later works, such as *Random Access* (1963) where visitors produced sounds by freely moving a magnetic head on the strips of audio cassette tape stuck on the wall, *Participation TV* (1963) where speaking into an attached microphone created dynamically moving patterns on the

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The term "audience" is associated with the viewer watching an artwork in a museum (or a cinema). However, in this article, the audience is the one who has acquired the identity of user because they are the one who changes the TV channel, who is placed in the exhibition space requiring them to participate and get involved, and who has an experience of oscillating between manipulating and gazing through the computer in the post-media era. Therefore, I will call them user-audience if necessary.

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Nam June Paik, "Art and Satellite," in *We Are in Open Circuits: Writings* by Nam June Paik, eds. John G. Hanhardt et al. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019), 180.

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Nam June Paik, "About the Exposition of the Music," in *We Are in Open Circuits: Writings* by Nam June Paik, eds. John G. Hanhardt et al. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019), 91-92.

TV screen, and *Paik-Abe Video Synthesizer* (1969) which made it possible to edit and synthesize video sources in real-time, using the video technology at that time. In this way, the contact between the audience and the works in Paik's exhibitions was mostly attained by shifting one-way technologies to two-way while building an environment as uncertain as possible.

Art historian David Joselit argued that in those days, although the TV was an institutionalized closed circuit, as a centralized and commercialized network system, artists turned it into an open-circuit by infiltrating it using the potentiality of information circulation inherent in the TV network.⁴ Reviewing some examples of this, Joselit put particular emphasis on Paik's work. Paik's methodology was marked by pioneering the DIY spirit ahead of time as if realizing the recently-coined term "tinkering." So Paik personally learned technological skills and made the TV more oriented towards open-circuit and interactivity, in cooperation with an engineer (Shuya Abe) or with his own hands. His purpose lay in breaking the functional fixedness of the TV, and as is often said the TV audience is in the "passive state of mind,"⁵ restoring its technical possibility. The result was many of his works, including *Participation TV*, in which he manipulated the standard TV sets to produce abstract, distorted, or minimal scan lines responding to the audience's actions.

Since this role of contact in connecting among the audience (the masses) has been discussed a lot in the context of participation, this article will focus more on the tactile. Tactility could be understood here as a concept associated with public participation in visual mass media and arts and culture since the beginning of modernity. More specifically, it is in line with Walter Benjamin's and Marshall McLuhan's discussions of tactility.⁶ According to Benjamin, the visuality of the film as a new reproduction medium has tactile nature and evokes multi-sensory sensations, unlike the previous forms of art. In cinema, if tactility is usage, vision is perception.⁷ The cinema is close to architecture in that one has to go and work within it using two senses simultaneously, not merely appreciating it. This understanding was based on the view of history that a new perceptual task could be achieved through the habit (non-attentive perception) of a group (the masses), rather than through contemplation as a wholesome visual experience required for traditional works of art. Therefore, the cinema is a new form of art to fulfill this task and this mode of distraction, appealing to both the eyes and ears of the recipient, is tactility itself.

McLuhan also sees tactility as a distinctive feature of TV, the medium representing the middle and late 20th century which succeeded the film. Both of these two philosophers agree that it is due to tactility that the evocation of experience overrides gazing in new visual media, such as TV and cinema, resulting in increasing the audience's participation than in the previous ones. For McLuhan, this phenomenon was meaningful because it was expected to counterbalance the Western letter(alphabet)-based ocularcentrism. Although the cinema might be a new media in the early and middle 20th century, McLuhan, living in the middle and late 20th century, understood that it is the last media of the old era, characterized by typography and machinery, as well as a hot media with asymmetrical sensation and high definition.⁸ In contrast, the TV with low density and definition is haptic, requiring the audience to complete the image. However, what McLuhan finds more fundamental is that "tactility is the interplay of the senses, rather than the isolated contact of skin and object."⁹ The tactility evoked by the TV includes the interactions occurring between plural senses as well as the point of physical contact between moving images and the recipient. If Benjamin regards the cinema as visual cognition involving tactility, McLuhan considers that in the TV, tactility and visuality could be separate things and that tactility is far essential in defining the electric media than visuality.

To summarize, for Benjamin and McLuhan, the tactility inherent in the media could be a concept for demonstrating the progressive execution of relation-building, interactivity, and synchronism. Through the discussion of tactility, they proceed to deal with the

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David Joselit, *Feedback: Television Against Democracy*, Korean trans. by Lee Honghwan and Ahn Daewoong (Seoul: Hyunsilmunhwa, 2016).

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Nam June Paik, "Video Synthesizer Plus," in *We Are in Open Circuits: Writings by Nam June Paik*, eds. John G. Hanhardt et al. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019), 146.

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Benjamin's and McLuhan's discussions on tactility, which were dealt in detail with the NJP Art Center's international symposium, are receiving significant attention. See: Dieter Daniels, "Touching Television: Participation Media with Marshall McLuhan, John Cage and Nam June Paik," *TV Commune, De-Inter-Trans-*, eds. by Lee Chaeyong and Kim Seongeun (Yongin: Nam June Paik Art Center, 2011).

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Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Korean trans. by Choi Seongman (Seoul: Gil, 2007).

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It is necessary here to consider the large-scale change for more than 30 years, or, to specify, the influence of American classical Hollywood cinema, which institutionalized a typical narrative style and was in control of cultural industry across the world.

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Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, Korean trans. by Kim Sangho (Seoul: Communication Books, 2011), p.528.

possibility of collective participation which extends step-by-step in media. Although they still belong to the time-honored Aristotelian line of understanding of sensation in that they deal with touching as having multiple proper sensibles, not a single one, they discovered the possibility of group participation through media technology. Perhaps because of his extraordinary interest in the masses and media, Paik's trajectory from the sound-image experiments with TV, video, and others to the satellite project meets this intersection between tactility and group participation.

Early-stage Network Art: A Global Collectivity as the Human Brain and Tactility

Paik's experiments on interactivity and synchronism in the middle and late 1980s concentrated on satellite technology, moving from repurposing the TV's centralized network system. The range of audience participation was also substantially extended from museum visitors to the masses through satellite technology. This is reflected in his satellite trilogy: *Good Morning Mr. Orwell, Bye Bye Kipling* (1986), linking Seoul, Tokyo, and New York, and *Wrap around the World* (1988), linking Beijing, Bonn, Kildare, Iceland, Jerusalem, Leningrad, London, Rio de Janeiro, Seoul, Tokyo, and New York. *Good Morning Mr. Orwell*, partially analyzed in the introduction, was a wild, cheerful, and playful refutation against the dystopian surveillance system based on network technology, anticipated in George Orwell's well-known novel *1984*.

Paik used satellite technology to build a colossal network that connects individuals from a hub of the daily space where a TV set is placed. He explains the purpose of using satellite technology by quoting mathematician Henry Poincare who said every discovery was not just the discovery of "new things but merely the new relationships between things already existing."¹⁰ He also adds that the best utility of satellite would be to create neural networks between new minds by producing unprecedented mutual relationships(*karma*) between human beings artificially and acceleratingly, ultimately contributing to the growth of economics and culture.¹¹ First of all, Paik's emphasis on relationship, not individual properties, could be understood in the context of cybernetics which had a significant influence on his art. The term cybernetics, stemming from the ancient Greek "Kubernetes(κυβερνήτης)," meaning "one who steers or governs," was first introduced by Norbert Wiener in his *Cybernetics: Or Control and Communication in the Animal*(1948). Its core concepts are the feedback mechanism, autonomy, and circulation in the control and communication of living organisms and machinery. Although cybernetics has at least three levels(the first, second and third order, etc.) in a more detailed perspective, they all have the tendency to pay attention to the interdependent relationship between individual elements in a whole environment, not their properties. In the control and communication system, cybernetics does not distinguish between living and artificial things (humanity, network technology, media, and the likes), the material and the immaterial(mind and brain, network signals, hardware, and the likes). In this context, Paik declares that "cybernetics, the science of pure relationship itself, has its origin in karma."¹² He sees *karma* as the principle of feedback circulation in which causes turn into effects and then effects turn into causes in the interrelationship or network among various agents.

Next, Paik's explanation of the purpose of using satellite technology to discover new relationships in comparison with neural networks seems to be inspired by the neuron doctrine, which has been actively investigated even until now since it was hypothesized first by Santiago Ramón y Cajal in the early 20th century. The neuron is the basic unit cell within the nervous system. Though separated from each other, neurons function only through flexible and variable contacts with others and get together to construct neural networks of various sizes. Scientists generally agree that the brain commands

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Nam June Paik, "Art and Satellite," in *We Are in Open Circuits: Writings by Nam June Paik*, eds. John G. Hanhardt et al. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019), 179.

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Nam June Paik, "Asatelite—In the light of the day after tomorrow," in *Nam June Paik: From Horse To Christo*, eds. Edith Decker and Irmeline Lebeer, Korean trans. Lim Wangjun, et al. (Yongin: Nam June Paik Art Center, 2018), 128-129.

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Dick Higgins, ed., *Manifestos: A Great Bear Pamphlet Series* (New York: Something Else Press, 1966).

senses, language, memory, motion, and homeostasis, as well as consciousness. These functions operate smoothly and harmoniously only when information processing properly occurs through the constant inputs and outputs of electric signals passing through neural networks. The brain may be a small organ occupying only a portion of our individual body, but the extensive neural network as a complex system is as unknown as the "entire" earth (furthermore, the cosmos). Recent neuroscience launched one of the most ambitious programs to draw a comprehensive map of neural connections in the brain (connectome) to understand the elements of the network, its highly complicated structure, and its rapid information integration of and interaction between the elements, but very little is known enough to present its anatomical description.¹³ Nevertheless, it is at least sure that the network is the key to the brain mechanism. Therefore, since the neural network has a relation-centered structure, going beyond the individual element-oriented dichotomy, and is scientific and technological, as well as very mystic and electric, Paik's use of it as a metaphor for the global-scale mutual connection via satellite is both figurative and realistic.

However, the audience participation in a satellite project cannot be as direct as the interaction produced by the traditional exhibition-based works of art. The visitors' participation in the exhibition space subverts their fixed role and encourages them to subjectively engage in the work, in a way that the human network surrounding the works of art, or the roles of artists, viewers, and critics, are reorganized. In comparison, seemingly, the TV audience can do nothing but watching the scenes transmitted to a TV set, sitting in their living room without changing channels. On the other hand, this also means that only this simple daily act is enough to hold an unprecedentedly large-scale gathering, regardless of where they are. Moreover, "with less than the cost of a one night Broadway production, [...] our trans-Atlantic satellite production will reach millions of people on two continents, and many million more behind the iron curtain."¹⁴ Indeed, high accessibility is one of the most significant advantages of mass-oriented media for the audience-users, while the power of collecting a great number of people at low cost using an established infrastructure, for producer-artists. So satellite technology may have certainly fascinated Paik, who dreamed of the "Global Village via TV."¹⁵ The technology could serve as a means for preliminary exercise in the transition to the next step, following the emergence of the modern anonymous masses, in which synchronous emotional experience is available without regard to spatial limitations.

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Olaf Sporns, Giulio Tononi, and Rolf Kötter, "The Human Connectome: A Structural Description of the Human Brain," *PLoS Comput Biol* 1(4): e42. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pcbi.0010042>, November 2, 2020.

Then, how can we understand the experience of connecting among the TV audience through satellite art? In his interpretation of Pablo Picasso and Mark Rothko in light of decentralized or multi-centered information circulation, Paik says that "the audience is only the access node of satellite communication which sends and receives multi-networks composed of unperceivable pulses of information, millions of signals. (Norbert Wiener wrote that the information, in which a message was sent, plays the same role as the information, in which a message is not sent.¹⁶)" This shows that Paik pictured the role of the audience as an access point in satellite communication, as well as the sending and receiving of large amounts of electric information not yet coded to convey a series of meanings.

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Nam June Paik, "First script for Good Morning Mr. Orwell," in *We Are in Open Circuits: Writings by Nam June Paik*, eds. John G. Hanhardt et al. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019), 222.

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Nam June Paik, "Art and Satellite," in *We Are in Open Circuits: Writings by Nam June Paik*, eds. John G. Hanhardt et al. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019), 143.

The description of the audience as an access node, beyond a network component, may sound as the mechanization of humans. However, as far as this is concerned, it is needed to have a more careful approach, which includes how Paik understood the purpose of technology in general, including satellite. For example, in his comment on *TV Bra for Living Sculpture* (1969), he argued:

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Nam June Paik, "Marie Bauermeister or 'I accept the universe' (B. Fuller)," in *Nam June Paik: From Horse To Christa*, eds. Edith Decker and Irmeline Lebeer, Korean trans. Lim Wangjun, et al. (Yongin: Nam June Paik Art Center, 2018), 261.

The real issue implied in "Art and Technology" is not to make another scientific toy, but how to humanize the technology and the electronic medium, which is progressing rapidly—too rapidly. [...] We will demonstrate the human use of technology, and also stimulate viewers

not for something mean but stimulate their phantasy to look for the new, imaginative and humanistic ways of using our technology.¹⁷

As Charlotte Moorman explained when she appeared in *Good Morning Mr. Orwell*, the live images on the TV screen attached to the human body changed according to the sound played by Moorman on her cello. This shows the human-machine relationship Paik pursued. The artist's original intention lay in humanizing technology, rather than mechanizing humans as in Hans Moravec-style transhuman, subsumed by future technology, or the cyborg, the ultimate merger between humans and technology. (This was also evident when Paik related Moorman and TV to two Americans making love.¹⁸) This perspective could be called a post-dichotomous approach towards man and machinery in the circulation of the whole world, considering its affiliation with cybernetics or Oriental thoughts, or a distinguished kind of humanism. Unlike the anthropocentric context with emphasis on the priority of human beings, it is more interested in focusing on their singularities and, by extension, technology as the height of the differences. According to this stance, the human-machine relationship is represented as non-subordinate, interdependent, and closely-related. For example, we humans are the only being who foresees their death, and thus, one of the essential functions of human groups is paying attention to and caring for death.¹⁹ Philosophers like Vilém Flusser even considers the denial of death as the "raison d'être" of media communication.²⁰ Additionally, as John Durham Peters notes, we use our hands to create artificial environments and artifacts as part of our life, unlike other higher mammals like the whale.²¹ All these peculiarities culminate in technology. Human beings' technology is inseparable from them, physically connected to their life and body, and its scale is so immense that it can have a (lethal) influence on the entire global system. In this sense, the human-machine relationship needs to be more sophisticatedly approached with deliberation on these unique features which differentiate humans from other beings on the earth, not making the former superior to the latter. Furthermore, Paik's attitude towards technology manifested throughout his works is subsumed under a larger category of ecological thought about global circulation. This shows that he regarded both man and machinery as the all-embracing origin, inspired by Oriental thoughts and cybernetics which does not divide the natural world into the living and the non-living. According to Paik, nature and technology are not dichotomously separated or opposed elements, but the foundation of all things under the sun. In this ecological foundation, man and technology exist not in the subordinate relationship, stuck in the chicken-and-egg dilemma, but in an entangled state, taking root in the womb of nature.

From Paik's explanation of "tele-vision" or literally meaning "see far" as the remote image,²² one can guess his prospect and vision about tele-communication. Meanwhile, his vision of aestheticization of network technology has a lot in common with the idea of Roy Ascott, who proposed the concept of telematics in art around the same time. If Paik adopted the broadcast network, Ascott deepened this vision using the computer-based communication network which became the embryo of today's cyberspace or the Internet culture. Because both of them used network technology and shared the goal of building a neural network on the global scale, it is worth referring to Ascott.

Let us first take a look at his concept of telematics. The term was coined by Simon Nora and Alain Minc in the book *L'Informatisation de la société: Rapport à M. le président de la République* (1978). Telematic art is primarily marked by interaction through computer-mediated telecommunications. Inspired by cybernetic theories, Roy Ascott threw himself into network technology and gradually incorporated it into his art. In 1982, he participated in the network project *World in 24 Hours* (1982) in which concurrent users from all over the world got their fortune told with the *Book of Changes*, and in 1983, organized *La Plissure du Texte* in which artists from different countries participated in collective creation using the ASCII code. As Paik's pioneering

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Nam June Paik, "TV Bra for Living Sculpture," in *We Are in Open Circuits: Writings by Nam June Paik*, eds. John G. Hanhardt et al. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019), 33.

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Nam June Paik, "Marcel Duchamp didn't think about video," in *Nam June Paik: From Horse To Christo*, eds. Edith Decker and Irmeline Lebeer, Korean trans. Lim Wangjun, et al. (Yongin: Nam June Paik Art Center, 2018), 249.

19

Norbert Elias, *Über die Einsamkeit der Sterbenden*, Korean trans. Kim Soojeong (Paju: Munhak Dongne, 1988), 11.

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Vilém Flusser, *Kommunikologie*, Korean trans. by Kim Seongjae (Seoul: Communication Books, 2001), 226-227, 278-279.

21

John Durham Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds*, Korean trans. Lee Heeun (Seoul: Culture Look, 2018), 124-140.

22

Nam June Paik, "My Jubilee ist Unverhemmet [My Jubilee is Unmetered]," in *We Are in Open Circuits: Writings by Nam June Paik*, eds. John G. Hanhardt et al. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019), 34.

attempt *Good Morning Mr. Orwell* had some problems, such as choppy progress, brief blackout, and unequal color space,²³ there were some unexpected results of fortune-telling in the *World in 24 Hours* due to code errors.²⁴ Like Paik, however, Ascott did not regard it as a failure, anticipating the contingency and uncertainty in interconnection through an electric network.

As is shown by the fact that second-order cybernetics and Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela's concept of autopoiesis are widely applied to computer science and even sociology (Niklas Luhmann),²⁵ the pursuit of contingency and uncertainty through technology is in no way an oxymoron. On the contrary, they go beyond the individualized ontology dividing self from others and marked the properties of communal participation and the contact occurring in it. For Paik and Ascott, this contact entails emotions. For Paik, the satellite is a mixture of yearning and technology, which he compared to the meeting of the tragic lovers Gyeonu and Jiknyeo in Korean folklore. Similarly, Ascott mentioned "embrace" and telematics in "Is There Love in the Telematic Embrace?" The "embrace" here extends to the post-media discourse at present, having implications of inclusion in the technological dimension towards meta-media, to use Manovich's term, and hugs as an event of contact between self and others. In this article, it is indeed crystal clear where Ascott was heading in technology-art and self-others. For concrete instance, he addresses Charles Fourier's notion of "love" as a passionate attraction. It represents the desire for contact-at-a-distance with others, or more specifically, thousands of those who are too far away to be reached physically. Ascott also believed that the love made possible through the telematic technology would outshine the physical attraction of the body. For him, the network node is part of planetary consciousness, like the synapse of the brain, and shares the more fundamental property of the constant process of sending and receiving. He even goes as far as to introduce other ideas, such as Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's noosphere, Gregory Bateson's "humans as part of the living world,"²⁶ and Peter Russel's planetary brain, to argue that the aestheticization of network technology would contribute to extending the consciousness of humanity and thereby, extending the human consciousness and thereby, recover the integrity of the globe.

Proposition for New Ethics for Contemporary Times and Possibility of Its Application

As examined above, Benjamin and McLuhan's discussion about the relationship between tactility and participation was brought to a more profound context by Paik and Ascott, who integrated visual art into network technology, prospering after the two previous media philosophers. The result is the transition to the stage in which one would approach the global community as a unified one, and its members as part of the whole, not as an independent individual. Significantly, this article pointed out that their discourses commonly led to the extension of the brain network.

However, one can find another similarity when considering their network art and views of the world in general. They provided no shared point in a particular context, on which the whole community members converge, and their idea of the community seems to be a gathering without any intention of practicing a particular act. Instead, they were more interested in creating the network environment itself, characterized by constant inter-connection and touching, through the aestheticization of technology as satellite art or telematic art, and their notion of tactility as communal participation by a collective brain was about commonly sensing and sharing emotions in the affective level, rather than any specific locutionary act. And the synaptic contact is essentially a kind of holism oriented toward wholeness, and its focus lies in the act of mutual touching, driven by the desire given by nature to the single global community. The purpose of artworks using network

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Park Sangae, "Good Morning Mr. Orwell: Video Tape Analysis," *NJP Reader #5: Paik-Orwell Club*, eds. Kim Seongeun and Park Sangae (Yongin: Nam June Paik Art Center, 2014), 174.

24

Ibid., 25.

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See Luciana Parisi, *Contagious Architecture* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2013).

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Gregory Bateson, *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1979), 17.

communication technology, too, is closer to the recovery of the brain's innate function of interconnection rather than to any ideological goals.

The restoration of the global nature as a collective brain may seem to be an unrealistic utopian concept or denounced as mysticism, for it is beyond the scope of academic validation. However, mysticism is in line with the reflection on the limitations of human imagination and exploration into a new kind of understanding, which accompanied the recent discourses about environments and the Anthropocene. Dipesh Chakrabarty²⁷ highlights that a crucial aporia in the Anthropocene discourse is our inability to grasp the planetary dimension on the human scale, while Lawrence Buell²⁸ and, more recently, Rob Nixon²⁹ argues that literary imagination is above all required for the ecological crisis. Chakrabarty even says that through art and fiction, we can "extend our understanding to those who in future may suffer the impact of the geophysical force"³⁰ and need "nonontological ways of thinking the human."³¹ Therefore, it is perhaps because Paik and Ascott had enlarged the network size to the global dimension to be immeasurable on the human scale that they had to use various religious or shamanistic motifs in depicting or embodying a collective network. This kind of thinking breaks away from the dichotomous demarcation to have a clear understanding of the world based on reason and objective facts. It is artistic imagination that open-mindedly receives the incomprehensibility of the world, even though the overwhelming majority of the world is scientifically inexplicable, and never puts any limits on the possibility of that comprehensive understanding.³² It is both ironic and interesting that through this artistic imagination, they found the possibility of building a global-scale network in technology and simultaneously incorporated the reflection on the thoughts of the past centuries that made this technological progress and reinforced anthropocentrism and the individuality of being.

As another perspective to interpret this context, contemporary thinker, Claire Colebrook offers us a short essay titled with a long compound word "Hypo-hyper-hapto-neuro-mysticism." Here, Colebrook discusses the present issue of tactility in relation to the brain.³³ First, he analyzes the tendency to pay more attention to embodied effects for centuries than reason-based thinking. He then criticizes the major phenomenological approaches to tactility and deals with the issue by dividing hyper-haptocentrism and hypo-haptocentrism, inspired by Derrida's deconstruction of haptocentrism. In hyper-haptocentrism, all things in the world have their own sense and are animated; life, the world, Gaia and all of its components are not separated; and everything touches just like humans. Accentuating the equal abilities among all different beings on the planet marks a turn away from anthropocentrism. On the other hand, it is also touching that causes contagion like the current Covid-19 pandemic, as well as brings about the violence of vertical hierarchy. This naturally leads to the necessity of ethical consideration, that is, of distance or proximity, which is the issue of hypo-haptocentrism. An example of hyper-haptocentrism is *Avatar* (2009), directed by James Cameron. As is known, Bruno Latour touches heavily on this film in his essay "An Attempt at a Compositionist Manifesto," urging love and caring for the various agents in the world and hybrid collectives, consisting of both humans and non-humans. Similarly, Colebrook noticed that the natives of Pandora have no individual reason, but are interconnected to a giant neural network that is vast, intelligent, complicated, approximal, and autopoietic. The Na'vi is represented as the ideal of future humanity as ultrahuman, not inhuman, who communicates with animals not by command but by touching.

Above all, the most notable point of Colebrook's assertion is that he approaches the tactile from a level in proximity to participation, not from the phenomenological view of the world. It fits smoothly with the main subject of this article, or the all-embracing connection through the network. This is particularly true because he argues that touch is not a single sense but meaningful only when accompanied by life, love, spirit, feeling, and emotions, thereby extending it as part of the brain (collective consciousness). He mentions that the brain has the essential attribute or the nature of "a responsive, adaptive,

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Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Global History*, eds. Jo Jihyeong and Kim Yongwoo (Paju: Seohaemunijip, 2010).

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Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

29

Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Korean trans. Kim Hongok (Seoul: Eco Livres, 2020).

30

Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcolonial Studies and the Challenge of Climate Change," *New Literary History* 43 (2012): 12.

31

Ibid., 13.

32

This unfolds as another larger context of ecology throughout Paik's art, though I do not go into much detail because it is beyond the scope of this article. See: *NJP Reader #2: Ecological Thinking*, ed. Kim Seongeun (Yongin: Nam June Paik Art Center, 2011).

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Claire Colebrook, "Hypo-hyper-hapto-neuro-mysticism," *Parrhesia* 18 (2013): 1-10.

distributed, dynamic, affective and embodied system." And if we are already connected like the Na'vi, it could be some ethical imperative to exclude certain haptic behaviors against the very nature. At this point, if the early-stage network artists' vision, discussed earlier in this article, is revisited from the viewpoint of Colebrook's argument about the brain's nature as the possibility of ethical criteria in the brain's nature, the implication of these artists' works can be much more deepened and broadened. This is because the perspective validates the hypothesis that the global connection is the innateness of human nature. In other words, the recovery of that connectivity can provide the possibility of a new humanity, a new relationship between humans (furthermore, all global beings irrespective of humans or non-humans) as the urgent problem in our age.

The Direction of Tactility and Web-based Museums in the Post-media Age

This article analyzed the audience-users' experience in the web-based visual platform in a broader context, narrowing down the issues of tactility and the brain. The object of analysis was accordingly concerned with Paik's and Ascott's early-stage network-based artistic projects, possibly leading to the present web-based platform and their vision of a global community represented by the brain

In the long-established ocularcentric culture, touch has been regarded as inferior and belonging to the sphere of intuition, which is more relative than reason. By nature, vision is optimized to recognize the peculiarity of each separate object and inevitably entails the act of keeping distance. So it has long been perceived as a dichotomous, individual, and reason-related sense. For example, Descartes, a mind-body dualist in the 17th century, prioritized sight as the primary means of acts of reason, and even when critical of it, he valued optical instruments for correction, not changing his preference. His criticism about sight was indeed about wrong knowledge or sensation likely caused by the imperfection of the eyes, not about the visual faculty itself. However, the pursuit of dichotomy and individualized, rational thinking that predominantly relied on sight for centuries brought about many side effects related even to the recent Anthropocene discourse. The other senses marginalized by sight are now considered pivotal in historicizing uncontextualized memory (the famous madeleine passage from Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*) or reviving the forgotten or declined ability like sensation or emotion. The growing attention to tactility in recent years could also be understood in this context of the return or reconstruction of the subjective realm that was hitherto excluded by the past logocentrism, as well as the maximization of visual presence due to the development of digital technology. The slime fad, the recent growth of ASMR culture on video streaming platforms, or VR as the foremost concern in the digital media discourse are representative examples of this tendency. In particular, touch, among other senses, is taken seriously in the philosophical thoughts and conceptual frames of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Luc Nancy, Jacques Derrida, and Gilles Deleuze, as a rich wellspring of thoughts in contemporary discussions on various levels related to the body, affectivity, connection, and mutual distance.

The tactility in ocularcentric mass media was viewed in relation to multisense and participation in the discussion of Benjamin and McLuhan. Paik and Ascott extended it to a maximum-scale interconnection using early network technology, thereby aiming at a global collective consciousness (the brain) network. As was mentioned above, their vision was more about restoring the brain's innate nature, not about realizing any specific object. For them, tactility means mutual attraction and touch, among numerous others, accompanied by sensation, emotion, and intuition, unlike individual reason, as was suggested by the keywords such as love, karma, and embrace. This kind of touch, existing

as a myriad of synapses, is materially based on the brain, which we can now take as a reference for new humanism (ultrahuman).

Nowadays, people are getting more and more anxious about the autonomous system free from the human intervention for artificial-intelligence-based (such as machine learning or deep learning) automation. Besides, companies' algorithms and data mining techniques to collect and use personal information and various cases of the government's manipulation and control of public opinion look like the reincarnations of Orwell's Big Brother or Bentham's Panopticon model through contemporary digital technology. In this adverse situation, some may think that the utopian orientation towards the collective consciousness as the brain is nothing but a rosy ideal too remote from reality. However, as Paik clarified the difference between his and McLuhan's positions,³⁴ or as the technology aestheticized by Ascott used as military communication in the Cold War age,³⁵ the situation surrounding the then network technology does not seem to have been positive. TV was monopolized by a few broadcasting stations, stuck in the closed-circuit in collusion with commercialism. People were terrified of major powers' unhindered development of nuclear weapons and wars, which made the Doomsday Clock, managed by the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, stayed fixed at three minutes to midnight in 1984, the same year when Paik's *Good Morning Mr. Orwell* was aired.³⁶ However, these days were also the period when individuals were forced to seriously and meticulously question and reflect upon human reason.

It would be necessary to diagnose this situation precisely. Strictly speaking, one needs to distinguish the affirmation of this unlimited possibility of tactility inherent in contemporary technology from the criticism about appropriation, such as monopolization, privatization, control, and attention economy by macro-actors in this network, such as the nation state, corporations, and military forces. For instance, art historian Edward A. Shanken placed his hope on the aestheticization of technology from Ascott to the present and the network as collective connectivity but, simultaneously, valued the disclosure by contemporary artists of the cases in which the same technology was used to manipulate and conceal public opinions.³⁷ However, the artistic projects using this network technology so far undertaken are to bring out the possibilities remaining untouched in it, aside from those already-fixed, problematic uses, and request us to be "nevertheless" connected with an open attitude, to become a part of a collective network whose very nature is contact.

Then, what kind of goal could present-day art museums set, inspired by the global-scale interconnection through technology in 20th century network art, especially when they are pursuing the transition to the web-based identity and will take advantage of the communication network in this pandemic era? The pandemic, which called for prolonged social distancing, coining new terms in Korea, such as "untact," "ontact," and "Corona blue," offered an opportunity to seriously think about the issue of contact between self and others again. Perhaps, experientially, we may have already become suspicious of the nebulous belief that man could live individually without trying to contact each other even before the international spread of the COVID-19 outbreak. The contact with others as an unpredictable being and a more open attitude toward the world is given as an ethical task to us, the audience-user who is always linked with the World Wide Web. To respond to this, how could contemporary museums, that will be reborn as network-based, build the condition for interconnection in consideration of tactility in the largest group, our collective consciousness as the brain, and continue their artistic programs to meet the requirement? How can they create a web-based ecosystem to stimulate and recover the nature of the global connection?

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"I can't be as optimistic as Marshall McLuhan. The enormous potentiality of communicative interaction in the electronic age is applied not between 'influential' and 'uninfluential' groups but when the 'influential' group exclusively uses (and manipulates) the 'uninfluential.' (The movement of information is always one-way)," Nam June Paik, 322.

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"Paradoxically, while Ascott's theories of telematic art have proposed the unification of minds in a global field of consciousness, ARPAnet(the precursor the Internet, which is the backbone of telematic exchanges) emerged out of the Cold War struggle between the superpowers for technological dominance," as cited in Edward A. Shanken, *Telematic Embrace: Visionary Theories of Art, Technology, and Consciousness* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 53.

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The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, <https://thebulletin.org/doomsday-clock/past-statements>, November 2, 2020.

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Edward A. Shanken, Korean trans. Shim Hyowon, "Deus ex Poiesis: A Manifesto for the End of the World and the Future of Art and Technology," Kim Namsi *et al.*, *Embracing the Parallel Lands* (Seoul: Hyunsil Munhwa A, 2018).