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# *Moon Is the Oldest TV:* Satellites and Nam June Paik's Cosmic Temporalities

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# *The Moon is the Oldest TV:* Satellites and Nam June Paik's Cosmic Temporalities

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On April 8, 2024, I watched, along with countless others occupying a certain swath of the globe, what Nam June Paik would have likely considered a very special kind of television: a total eclipse of the Sun. I stood with crowds of others in the expansive spaces that would provide a clear view of this celestial obstruction. The cosmos advertised a live event, and we showed up, en masse, to watch. For more than an hour, I patiently monitored the moon's slow transit as its flat silhouette edged out the blinding sun. But then, as if something one was eagerly anticipating could unexpectedly occur, the event I had assiduously tracked disappeared; the dark glasses revealed nothing. Taking them down, I looked, for the first time ever, directly at the sun. A hole had been punched in the sky; color drained from the world; the temperature precipitously dropped; birds went silent; and the hues of sunset incongruously appeared on every horizon.<sup>1</sup> The world seemed to hold still. And then, two and a half minutes later, with trembling suddenness, a fiery dot on the edge of the disk burst into blazing blindness; I raised my glasses again and witnessed the Moon's anticlimactic retreat into invisibility.<sup>2</sup> The shadow of the moon continued its creep forward, ushering in a new area and a new set of stargazers into the same unfolding epiphany. The Moon, typically only given to us by consequence of the Sun's sidelong glance, claims the awesome power of a satellite, as a thing that both connects and obstructs.

Watching the eclipse, it was impossible to ignore the usually suppressed fact that grounds every moment of our existence—that we reside on a satellite with our own satellites, gyroscopically turning in an infinite universe. Despite the fast movement of objects in space, observing an eclipse can feel slow; it is an act of uncommon patience and attention in our present day, in which there is a compulsive, habitual temptation to look away—to check a feed and scroll through distracting content.<sup>3</sup> In an era

I am indebted to Gregory Zinman, Brook Bellisle, and Sang Ae Park for their conversation and assistance while writing this essay.

1 Laurence Pevsner makes this same observation about the horizon in his essay on the 2024 eclipse. See Laurence Pevsner, "Total Eclipse of the Mind," NOEMA (April 4, 2024). np. <https://www.noemamag.com/total-eclipse-of-the-mind/>

2 The astounding spectacle of a solar eclipse is something of a galactic accident produced by the coincidence that the Sun is four-hundred times larger than our moon, but the Moon is four-hundred times closer to us. (Pevsner, np.) Another coincidence: on the morning of this epic event, I received an invitation to speak about Nam June Paik, putting the artist and his work on moons and satellites into the forefront of my mind, inserting him between me and this event.

3 These movements in the sky, however, are actually phenomenally fast; it is just our distance and perspective that makes it appear to inch along. The Earth circles the sun at approximately 67,000 miles per hour while rotating each day at roughly 1,000 miles per hour. The moon swings around us every twenty-seven days at more than 2,000 miles per hour. Moreover, as a unit, our solar system whirls around the galaxy at 490,000 miles per hour. Rhett Herman, "How Fast is the Earth Moving?" *Scientific American*, October 26, 1998. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-fast-is-the-earth-mov/#:~:text=The%20earth%20rotates%20once%20every,roughly%201%2C000%20miles%20per%20hour>

of “asynchronicity,” in which live television no longer galvanizes disparate viewers, an eclipse provides a singular moment to notice our place in the order of things and to experience cosmic presence in a moment of shared simultaneity. Simultaneity, once one looks into space, is strange, as Paik no doubt noticed in his rigorous attention to satellite transmission times and delays.<sup>4</sup> It takes the Sun’s light more than eight minutes to reach the earth, and 1.3 seconds for the Moon’s.<sup>5</sup> Simultaneity takes time; that is, it takes space, too. Simultaneity exists not in an instantly expiring moment, but in a duration that measures the distance the signal has traveled. Sometimes this gap is so brief that it practically imperceptible, but it is always there.

4 Paik’s original scripts and planning documents for *Good Morning Mr. Orwell* and *Bye Bye Kipling* both make particular mention of the inherent delay of satellite transmission and how he might exploit it. See “First Script for Good Morning, Mr. Orwell (1983)” and “Proposal for Bye Bye Kipling (1986)” in *We Are in Open Circuits: Writings by Nam June Paik*, eds. John G. Hanhardt, Gregory Zinman, and Edith Decker-Phillips (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019), 224, 230–233.

5 Andrew Fraknoi, “Light as a Cosmic Time Machine,” PBS.org. <https://www.pbs.org/seeinginthedark/astronomy-topics/light-as-a-cosmic-time-machine.html>

6 The first satellite artwork is Douglas Davis’s *Seven Thoughts* (December 29, 1976). It was followed in 1977 by the *Documenta 6 Satellite Telecast* (June 1977), Liza Bear and Willoughby Sharp’s *Send/Receive Satellite Network* (1977), and Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz’s *Satellite Arts* (1977).

7 Around the same time, in 1966, Paik began another “moon” artwork, *Electronic Moon No.2* (1966–1972), with his collaborator Jud Yakult. This film, transferred to video, combines images of the moon with electronic distortion on filmed TV sets and other experimental manipulations of the content.

Paik is well-known as one of the first “satellite artists,” among a small cadre of experimenters who gained access to the new telecommunications technology in the late 1970s.<sup>6</sup> But this was not the first time Paik thought about moons and their relationship to televisual likeness. In this essay, I will frame Paik’s earlier video-sculpture *Moon is the Oldest TV* (1965) as his first “satellite” artwork.<sup>7</sup> Positioning it as such highlights a different set of qualities hidden in his frantic satellite projects of the 1970s and 1980s. Against the speed and exuberance of productions such as *Good Morning Mr. Orwell* (1984), *Bye Bye Kipling* (1986), or *Wrap Around the World* (1988), which modeled the exhilarating experience of instantaneous, global telecommunication, I want to use the meditative slowness of *Moon is the Oldest TV*, in its various iterations across Paik’s lifetime, as a way of finding moments of pause, stillness, and delay within his other more canonical satellite works. This reframing of regard enables us think about how Paik gets viewers to attend to the satellites themselves and the strange temporalities they produce under the guise of “instantaneity,” rather than just the images they can send and the borders they can cross.

## Moon Is the First Satellite

Paik's video-sculpture *Moon Is the Oldest TV*, made in various iterations between 1965 and 2000, unfurls over an arc of television sets. Perched chest-high on black plinths that recede from vision in the darkened gallery, each monitor centers a trembling image of Earth's only natural satellite. Paik's array charts the phases of the Moon across the screens, multiplying the eight standard positions to between eleven and thirteen, depending on the edition.<sup>8</sup> Video-recordings, which appear on screen in the later versions of the work, give viewers an impossible sight—an entire month laid out before them, as if one is on Earth but outside of lived space and time. Through Paik's eyes, we attend to a satellite. This sampling of evenings recasts the subtle spectacle of the Earth turning away from the Sun into an epic narrative of struggle, vanquishment, and triumphant return.

It is not hard to imagine why Paik would have described the Moon as the oldest or first television. That glowing orb with its unfolding nightly drama was, for millennia, the most spectacular show on earth. It was an after-dinner entertainment with a regular schedule and predictable-yet-comforting content. One might be tempted to call it “cinema” instead, because it is, in essence, light bouncing off a screen; but it is the liveness of the image that makes the Moon such an important analogue to the televisual experience as well as its identity as our original satellite. It is the mother of all those little moons that provide the live connections we come to expect on our screens. If one looks closely enough and forgets the generalization that each moon phase lasts several days, one could see the shadow sneak across the surface, defying the easy apprehension of the image as a still life. A satellite's dynamism is beyond our inattentive grasp. It asks one to see in slow time. This slow time of the satellite, the first television, has, ironically, become harder to grasp because of the very fast pace of communication enabled by the Moon's technological offspring. We expect speed and thus can no longer perceive the slowness embedded within it.

<sup>8</sup> Sang Ae Park, archivist at Nam June Paik Art Center provided the following history of *Moon is the Oldest TV*: Paik first made a manipulated CRT monitor with a “moon” image in 1965 for the *Electronic Art I* exhibition at Galleria Bonino in New York. While he did not use the title “Moon is the Oldest TV” for this work he adapted this work for *Moon is the Oldest TV* in 1976, which included twelve monitors. Both Nam June Paik Art Center and Centre Pompidou use 1965–1976 as the original date for the multiple monitor works in their collection. He then recreated the works using videotaped images of the moon, because the altered monitors could produce electric shocks endangering technicians and art handlers. In 2000 he added a thirteenth monitor and created images using computer software. Email from Sang Ae Park to the Author, June 28, 2024.

The original version of *Moon Is the Oldest TV* was made in 1965, the same year that consumer model video cameras first became available, but Paik did not use one to create it. It did not use recorded footage to create the images on the monitors. Rather, Paik intervened directly in the electronic guts of the television sets to make his images. By inserting and adjusting magnets inside the Cathode Ray Tube of each receiver, he conjured circles, semicircles, crescents, and delicate arcs, emulating the phases of the Moon he would later tape. Like the actual moon phases, these only appear to be stable images. They are trembling, changing and live. The 1965 iteration of *Moon Is the Oldest TV* connects satellites—natural and artificial—to Paik's minimal, contemplative early works that call attention to the material conditions of the mediated image. *Zen for TV* (1963), for example, reduced the screen image to a single horizontal raster line, and *Magnet TV* (1965) twisted and warped the broadcast image into a shimmering, looped petals of electronic distortion.

*Moon Is the Oldest TV* made the hardware of the apparatus and how it functioned clearly visible by sundering it from the distractions of its software, or content. Fellow video artist Martha Rosler described these early works of Paik's as violations of the United States' "central shrine—TV"<sup>9</sup> because they challenged the role television held in contemporary American culture (and beyond) as a site of devotion and ritualized attention. Television's shrine-status also suggests that despite its familiarity it was still a mysterious object, particularly regarding its technical and material properties.

Positioning *Moon Is the Oldest TV* as Paik's first satellite work connects his live TV experiments to a dominant theme in his early work—that of exposing the materiality of television through moments of slowness

or "boredom"—but which is, perhaps, difficult to locate in the cacophony and chaos of the later, live satellite transmissions.<sup>10</sup> What one sees when looking at the 1965 version of *Moon Is the Oldest TV* is the live action of electrons on a screen reacting to their particular material conditions as reformulated by Paik's magnets. He directs the viewer's attention not to the image but to the equipment that structures the image. In the later versions of

9 Martha Rosler, "Video: Shedding the Utopian Moment" in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*, Kristine Styles and Peter Seltz, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 469.

10 On "boredom" and materiality in Paik's early work, see Ina Blom, "Boredom and Oblivion," *The Fluxus Reader*, ed. Ken Friedman (Chichester, UK: Academy Editions), 63–90.

102 the work, which use recorded video of our moon, Paik has us monitor a satellite. The moon is not equipment, per se, but in the wake of his extensive use of telecommunication satellites throughout the 1980s this revision focuses the viewer's attention on those objects in the sky that make global television possible.

“Monitor,” as I use it above, is both a noun and a verb, a double meaning that points to both the equipment of television and the act of watching it. Philosopher and film theorist Stanley Cavell wrote in 1982 that the mode of perception activated by “television’s material basis is that of monitoring.”<sup>11</sup> When watching television—live or recorded—one is, he argued, like a security guard waiting for something eventful to appear out of the repetitive, banal, and utterly familiar.<sup>12</sup> To keep us watching, television must have both: the uneventful is the ground from which the event might appear and call us into attentive presence.

Paik’s satellite spectaculars are jam-packed with live performances and novel visual elements, but this content is the uneventful ground upon which real moments of interest, as per Cavell’s description, can appear. Paik’s satellite productions are punctuated by moments in which the satellite makes its presence emphatically felt, standing out from the barrage of apparently fast-moving information. He gives the viewer moments of slowness, both meditative and disruptive or obstructive, in which one can perceive the material existence of the satellite itself, often by its refusal to provide the instantaneous connections one erroneously expects.

## Star Systems

Nam June Paik first used a telecommunications satellite to make an artwork on June 24, 1977. He appeared as the lead-off of three acts during the “worldwide opening” of Documenta 6 in Kassel, Germany, followed by Joseph Beuys and Douglas Davis.<sup>13</sup> Alongside his collaborator, Charlotte Moorman, Paik spent his nine minutes of satellite time presenting a scattershot sampling of his art from over the last decade.<sup>14</sup> He rapidly moves between

11 Stanley Cavell, “The Fact of Television,” *Dedalus* 11.4 (Fall 1982): 85.

12 Cavell, 89.

13 Michael Glasmeier and Karin Stengel, eds. *50 Years Documenta, 1955–2005*, vol. 2 (Kassel: Kunsthalle Fridericianum, 2005), 273.

14 I discuss this work at length in Kris Paulsen, *Here/There: Telepresence, Touch, and Art at the Interface* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2017), 100–107.

works such as *TV Bra for Living Sculpture* (1969), *TV Buddha* (1974), *TV Cello* (1971), and *TV Bed* (1972), while engaging in a variety of irreverent acts: he places hollowed-out television sets and radios on Moorman's head, eats apples, smokes cigarettes, burns a smiley face in a piece of paper, and talks non-stop to Moorman, the audience, the buddha, and to himself. He does not give viewers or his breathless collaborator time to attend to the artworks' details or effects. Those unfamiliar with Paik's work or Fluxus performance would likely struggle to get their bearings before being shifted to a new set of objects and unexpected absurdities. Amid the apparent chaos, Paik mentions names and places, mapping personal connections in real time across the twenty-five countries reached by the transmission. He calls out to his famous friends, like former First Lady of the United States Jacqueline Kennedy-Onassis, who he knows is watching at home. The content of Paik's show may be frenzied and anarchic, but his repeated citation of the satellite's reach surfaces the invisible infrastructure and extensive planning that was necessary to make contact with his eminent acquaintances or with the masses of unknown viewers tuning in from around the world.<sup>15</sup> Seeing Paik's work demonstrated for this large international audience is not what is most important here; it is window dressing that creates an occasion for thinking about satellites and their reach.

Paik's Documenta performance set the template for his trilogy of satellite spectacles that followed in the 1980s, which are typified by fast-paced, frenetic switching between content and continental feeds, wild distortion, and disordered narrative. Rather than just shouting out to his celebrity friends, who were invisibly present in their private homes, these multi-site events created telepresent constellations of stars in videospace: pop stars, avant-garde luminaries, champion athletes, and media personalities linked up to one another across continents, cuts, and split screens. With their fast-paced, kinetic overexposure of diverse content, Paik's satellite works of the 1980s are also prescient preambles to the aesthetics of our current attention economy, which relies on what he would influentially term the "electronic superhighway:" the multi-layered telecommunications system formed

<sup>15</sup> Gregory Zinman argues that Paik's satellite works, and the numerous related planning documents that exist, show what a rigorous planner he was, despite his aesthetic embrace of what might look like chaos. "What emerges from reading these proposals is not a sense of chaos but rather of programmatic rigor, something rarely associated with this artist." Gregory Zinman, "The Script is not Final, and Is Subject to Changes": Nam June Paik Between the Page and the Screen," in *We Are in Open Circuits*, 75.



*Good Morning Mr. Orwell* in 1984 was Paik's first satellite project that directly joined far-flung locations with bi-directional, live contact. Intended as a joyful rejoinder to George Orwell's dystopian vision of state surveillance that centered bi-directional television as a primary tool of this oppression, *Good Morning Mr. Orwell* refigured the technology as a conduit for play and experimentation. Paik recruited artists and musicians to appear live for an international audience on New Year's Day.<sup>17</sup> The program, which linked performers in Paris with those in New York City and San Francisco, opens with a duet by pop-star Peter Gabriel and unlikely avant-garde crossover success Laurie Anderson, singing "This is the Picture (Excellent Birds)." They may be in one of the cities, but it is impossible to tell: their act is set in the placeless place of a green-screen stage. Their computer altered performance does not bear any indication of liveness; in fact, its heavy production suggests that it is just like any other recorded music video that might play endlessly on MTV. Much of the rest of the broadcast stages collisions between performers and content in the three cities meeting in the jumbled middle space of the video screen. In addition to Anderson and Gabriel, avant-garde idols John Cage, Josef Beuys, Merce Cunningham, Ben Vautier, Allen Ginsburg, and Peter Orlovsky rubbed electronic shoulders with pop acts like Oingo Boingo, Sappho, Urban Sax, and the Thompson Twins.<sup>18</sup> In short, the program was full of "events" aimed at capturing a large and diverse audience from across the world.<sup>19</sup> But as the opening performance makes clear, much of the program would not actually make liveness its central feature. Instead, it took liveness as the premise for paying attention in a particular way: waiting for something unexpected

16 For Paik's descriptions of the "electronic superhighway" see his essays "Media Planning for the Post Industrial Age" (1974) and "Rendez-vous Celeste" (1984/1986/1988) in *We Are in Open Circuits*, 163, 182.

17 For the sake of brevity, I will limit my discussion to *Good Morning Mr. Orwell*. In the later satellite works, fewer of the "events" I am interested in—glitches, delays, and other "errors"—are evident in the single channel tapes that document the live works. This may be because of Paik's increasing skill as a producer, or it may be a result of his heavy editing of the tapes that serve as documents of the live events. As Gregory Zinman has discussed at length, Paik reread the material from these works numerous times, and the current documents in circulation through EAI may bear little resemblance to what was broadcast at the time. Gregory Zinman, "Video Art's Past and Present "Future Tense": The Case of Nam June Paik's Satellite Works," in *Object—Event—Performance: Art, Materiality, and Continuity since the 1960s*, ed. Hannah B. Hölling (New York: Bard Graduate Center, 2022).

18 Paik consistently analogized these telepresence meetings of celebrities to celestial events, claiming them as on par with those that occur in the heavens: "How often do stars on the earth meet? How often or seldom do stars in the heavens meet each other? Is it possible for a star on earth and a star in the heavens to meet? That will be the ultimate challenge for the electronic superhighway." ("Rendez-vous Celeste" (1984/1986/1988), 182). He saw his event as creating cultural eclipses, the once-in-a-lifetime remote meetings of Joseph Beuys and Allen Ginsburg, who had never encountered one another in physical space. "The heavenly stars (Mars, Saturn, Altair, Vega, etc.) meet periodically, but the earthly ones do so very rarely," he writes. "The satellite will no doubt amplify these mysteries of encounter by geometric progression." ("Art & Satellite (1984)," 181)

to happen.<sup>20</sup> As with the guard watching Cavell's monitors, the viewer waits for something unusual to stand out from flow of information. Despite the novelty of so much that occurred in the program, there was nothing particularly "eventful" about the performances or their unusual, distorted manipulation. They were the background needed so that the figure of liveness-as-delay could appear in the foreground.

Reviewers at the time, as well as Paik himself, noted the technological difficulties and glitches that plagued the program.<sup>21</sup> But it is in these momentary malfunctions that the work actualizes its claims to liveness and makes satellite technology visible.<sup>22</sup> After Gabriel and Anderson's song, writer George Plimpton provided

an introductory explanation of the premise of Paik's "rather unusual event" to the American audience. In what should be an easy exchange with his French counterpart, actor Claude Villers, Plimpton awkwardly inhabits the stretchy time of live telecommunication. In an obviously scripted bit, the hosts attempt to share a champagne toast across the split screen that folded more than 3,600 miles of space and erased six hours of global daytime; but what Plimpton and Villers are unable to account for is the approximately one second delay from the Brightstar Satellite, hovering 22,000 miles above them. Plimpton is unprepared for the "real time" of satellite telecommunication that does not match the temporality of his embodied experience. He has not learned to inhabit the duration it takes for a signal to leave the earth and return; he forgets to live in slow time of satellite "instantaneity" as news casters do to make their conversations mimic in person exchanges and to render the satellite interface invisible. Each line Plimpton speaks crashes into Villers's delayed response, creating a pileup of words that overwhelms the originally intended gag, and becomes an actual event in Cavell's terms. It is the car crash on the electronic superhighway that draws our attention.<sup>23</sup>

19 While Paik sites different viewership numbers for *Good Morning Mr. Orwell* across several writings, he calculates the total to be between 26–33 million in *Art for 25 Million People*. This total includes the live audiences in the United States, Korea, and France, as well as those who saw it as an edited rebroadcast in Japan, Mexico, and Brazil. Nam June Paik, *Art for 25 Million* (Berlin: Daadgalerie, 1984), unpaginated.

20 Television theorist Marita Sturken argues that the fact of a program's liveness confers importance on an event that might not be significant otherwise. Marita Sturken, "Television Vectors and the Making of a Media Event: The Helicopter, the Freeway Chase, and National Memory," in *Reality Squared: Televisual Discourses on the Real*, ed. James Friedman (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 187.

21 Charles Hagen, "Good Morning, Mr. Orwell": PBS and The Kitchen, *Artforum* Vol. 22, No. 8 (March 1984): 98–99.

22 In Paik's own words, the appeal of live broadcast is its solicitation of risk. Nam June Paik, "A Satellite—The light of the future Asatte-litterally, the day after tomorrow (1987)," in *We Are in Open Circuits*, 187.

23 Paik describes complaints about technical glitches and content of his satellite works as "the first car-accident in [sic] E-Highway," "Rende-vous Celeste" (1984/1986/1988) in *We Are in Open Circuits*, 184.

106 Real time is a false promise in satellite telecommunication. Space is not eradicated; it is instead experienced as a transit that takes measurable time. Instantaneity requires patience and slowness. To experience the simultaneity that satellite transmission both presumes and produces requires the construction of an expanded moment, the spatialization of shared time.

Paik planned for a similar moment in the broadcast that would sonically illustrate the movement of the signal through space by means of an audio delay. Mitchell Kriegman attempted to perform a “space yodel,” bouncing the sound of his voice not off Swiss mountaintops but off Brightstar. But the effect fails, and at best the viewers hear Kriegman’s echo from the walls of the studio stage. Kriegman’s voice falls flat, landing back on earth with a thud. Later in the same program, Paik successfully adapts a performance by satellite art pioneers Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz that would visualize what Plimpton accidentally demonstrated sonically.<sup>24</sup> Paik sent the image of Merce Cunningham dancing to the satellite and back to the same feed, creating a visual feedback echo of ghost performers. Behind Cunningham are his past selves rendered as present by the satellite delay. As Paik described it in his planning notes, “the half inch distance between two images means thousands of miles [of] space electronically compressed and we see twenty of them that means millions of miles of electronic trip in one picture.”<sup>25</sup> In Cunningham’s stacked image and in Plimpton’s cascade of words we see and hear the satellite. Just as in the waxing and waning of Paik’s trembling orbs in *Moon is the Oldest TV*, one sees space as time, arrayed before the viewer such that it becomes impossible to separate one from the other or eradicate either, not by technology or imagination.

In the moments like these, which regularly punctuate the virtuosic performances by musicians or digital artists throughout *Good Morning Mr. Orwell*, Paik provides opportunities for the satellite to fail to be

24 I discuss Galloway and Rabinowitz’s work and their attempts to embody satellite temporality in Kris Paulsen, “Inhabiting the Interface: The Mixed Reality of Satellite Telecommunication,” in *Here/There: Telepresence, Touch, and Art at the Interface* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017), 95–119. Throughout his many writings on his satellite works, Paik regularly gives credit to Galloway and Rabinowitz for inspiring some of the most provocative bits in the works, particularly those that attempt to make experimental use of the satellite and its delay. In “Context is Content... Content is Context,” Paik laments that he does not feel he received proper acknowledgment in the productions (“Sorry the credits were so small!”) and that the performances were botched (“They were magnificent at the rehearsals but somebody pushed the wrong button at the real thing”), so that the satellite effects were not as fully realized as in Galloway and Rabinowitz’s original works. Nam June Paik, “Context is Content... Content is Context,” in *We Are In Open Circuits*, 186.

25 Nam June Paik, “First Script for Good Morning, Mr. Orwell (1983)” in *We Are in Open Circuits*, 224, 230–233.

invisible. Most interfaces, as Alexander R. Galloway explains in his book *The Interface Effect*, play at becoming invisible, of connecting here to there in a seamless way that erases their very functioning. “As technology,” he writes, “the more a dioptic device erases traces of its own functioning (in actually delivering the thing represented beyond), the more it succeeds in its functional mandate; yet this very achievement undercuts the ultimate goal: the more intuitive a device becomes the more it risks falling out of media all together, becoming as naturalized as air or as common as dirt.”<sup>26</sup> At a moment when satellite technology was becoming an increasingly commonplace and, therefore, invisible technology, if rarely used for art or by anyone but broadcasters, Paik re-mystifies it by creating the conditions in which it can become materially obstinate. *Good Morning Mr. Orwell*, in turn, shrinks the distance from here to there, and then makes us feel the time it takes to eradicate space. Now is also a version of then.

### Global Grooves, Cosmic Gaps

<sup>26</sup> Alexander R. Galloway, *The Interface Effect* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2012), 25.

<sup>27</sup> Or as it was described by PBS host Russell Connor in 1973's tape for broadcast *Global Groove*, Paik provides “a glimpse of the televisual landscape of tomorrow, when you will be able to switch to any TV station on earth.” Retrospectively, what seems most utopian, here, is that in Paik's imagination the cultures connected do not become homogenized in the process.

<sup>28</sup> I cite here the title of Paik's 1973 single-channel tape for broadcast, *Global Groove*. In this work, Paik sketches the format of his later satellite works, mixing performances from different cultures and regions with electronic effects. Russell Connor introduces the tape, describing it as “a glimpse of the video landscape of tomorrow, when you will be able to switch to any TV station on the earth, and TV Guide will be as fat as the Manhattan telephone book,” a future that Paik satellite works attempt to actualize.

<sup>29</sup> Gregory Zinman, “The Script is not Final, and Is Subject to Changes”: Nam June Paik Between the Page and the Screen,” in *We Are In Open Circuits*, 77.

On the surface, Paik's satellite works attempt to make parties telepresent to one another via the live, real-time transmission of data. He prototypes what the world could look like once connected by the electronic superhighway.<sup>27</sup> In the shared space of the screen, he appears to dissolve the distance between here and there in a simultaneous, cross-cultural now of a “global groove.”<sup>28</sup> As Gregory Zinman has noted Paik “did not aim at a fascicle universality, but rather meant to mediate a robust plurality, opening cultural windows through which different faces, customs and art could be seen.”<sup>29</sup> This utopian vision of quick connection and rapid exchange in a shrinking world is, however, regularly punctuated by intentional and unintentional moments of slowness that trip up the world-wrapping promised. Paik does not let the viewer forget that they are beholden to the materiality of even greater distances than those earthly ones the programs claim to collapse, and

108 that the little moons that make this possible are, unlike the “oldest TV,” owned by someone, controlled by corporations or states that do not make such connections easy. His utopian gesture of a world multiply in touch is repeatedly countered by moments that expose the infrastructure that supports this possibility and reminds viewers of what they must forget to imagine these connections.

Satellites, Paik wrote, would transform video not just into “high art” but “the HIGHEST art-form humankind has invented.”<sup>30</sup> While Paik jokingly points to the literal height of this “highest art,” necessitating equipment hovering thousands of miles above the earth, he is quite serious in his claim. The liveness afforded by satellites is equivalent to a “miracle,” he argues, and thus has the weight of religious experience. Through the strange not-quite-instantaneous “now” provided by “LIVE video art,” Paik writes, “we are finally able to deal very concretely with the central problems of human existence (chance, hazard, bet, venture).”<sup>31</sup> His ambition for satellite art was not just to “transmit existing symphonies and operas to other lands.” He wanted also to “master differences in time; play with improvisation, in-determinism, echoes, feedbacks [sic] and empty spaces;” that is, he aimed to highlight the material realities of the technologies and their limitations against the feel-good fantasies they easily support.<sup>32</sup>

The visions of togetherness and generous exchange exhibited in the content of Paik’s satellite works are only possible because he was, for those brief hours, in control of the satellites. His obsessive planning and skilled handling of bureaucracy implies that avoiding dystopia in 1984 and beyond depends on who enables the connections and who administers the hardware. Paik’s satellite works do not just shrink the world into a “global village.” They also make one see and feel the long distance between Earth, the Moon, and back. His intentionally inexpert use of the satellites signals the difference from the norm and indicates that another way is possible. In the delays and disruptions of the smooth flow of telecommunication that he planned for and solicited, Paik creates eclipses—monumental, obstructive

30 Nam June Paik, “Context is Content... Context is Context (1985),” in *We Are in Open Circuits*, 186.

31 Nam June Paik, “Context is Content... Context is Context (1985),” in *We Are in Open Circuits*, 186. For an excellent discussion Paik’s concept of liveness or “oneness” see Gregory Zinman, “Video Art’s Past and Present “Future Tense”: The Case of Nam June Paik’s Satellite Works,” in *Object—Event—Performance: Art, Materiality, and Continuity since the 1960s*, ed. Hannah B. Hölling (New York: Bard Graduate Center, 2022).

32 Nam June Paik, “Art & Satellite (1984),” in *We Are in Open Circuits*, 180.

events that show us our place in the world and expose the workings of the technologies that quickly become invisible.