

On the “Anti”possibility of Online Exhibition

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A great silence reigns over Tokyo University of the Arts, Ueno Campus, where I am currently writing this article. Not to mention, this is because of the recent global pandemic of COVID-19. Some museums and galleries have just started to reopen with entire infectious disease control measures, yet almost all of the cultural institutions throughout Japan had been forced to close from March to May. According to article uploaded the Asahi Digital Newspaper in the morning on June 22, the total number of the dead all over the world due to the virus is 465,880 as of the day. The data provided by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (as of noon, June 21, 2020) shows that the number of people infected reached 17,864 in Japan.

Therefore, we, humankind, are still in the middle of the “coronavirus crisis”. However, perhaps because some are hasty or good at changing their mind so quickly, the discourses “after-corona” and “new-normal” are already widespread. In the context of contemporary art, more and more artists, curators, and art critics are now discussing the possibility of online exhibition in various media. In such discussions, many predict the birth of new experience and regard the coronavirus crisis as a “chance”. Here is discourse that highlights the limitation of online exhibition.

This point out the limit of online space against the backdrop of art appreciation, emphasize the impossibility of replacing the bodily experience of artwork.

Although it goes without saying that these arguments (that is, both the possibility and limitation of online exhibition) all important, I would like to discuss the online exhibition of contemporary art from a slightly different angle. While new possibilities of online exhibition are concealed everywhere in experimental ways in the “Alter-narratives” exhibition, insightful contributors of this catalogue will certainly find out these possibilities. Thus, my article proposes a viewpoint of the “anti”possibility of online exhibition. It should be noted that the “anti”possibility is different from the “im”possibility or the “non”possibility (these are just two variations of “limitation”).

As is identified in Japanese postwar art group Gutai’s “International Sky Festival” (1960), art can forge idiosyncratic channels that transform “limitation” into “creation”. As is exemplified in the images of Gogh and Gauguin (they are a little stereotype though), this is because artists have historically been penurious so they needed to invent way to survive by making out of almost nothing. Or, artists some-

times maximize “limitations” in unique, surprising manners, instead of overcoming (eliminating) them. There is a possibility produced by taking disadvantages: I shall call it “anti”possibility.

In response to the question “What is the biggest advantage of online exhibition?”, many people would mention the easy accessibility and the semi-permanent of the Internet. In other words, compared to the physically organized exhibition, more people can “visit” online exhibitions beyond the limitation of time and space. In this regard, the “Alter-narratives” exhibition does NOT take such an advantage of online exhibition, gaining a radical intensity. The decision, made by the curators, to the show within a month should be considered in relation to online exhibition’s “anti”possibility. The under-examined potentiality of the Internet, which “entrepreneurs” have not yet fully explored, seems to be concealed in this unusual decision.

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