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### Re: Paik. On time, changeability and identity in the conservation of Nam June Paik's multimedia installations

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# INTRODUCTION

## Rethinking the *Object of Conservation* in Multimedia Installations

On a cold winter's day in southern Germany in early December 2008, upon my arrival at the ZKM Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe where I held the position of conservator, I received a message that contained devastating information concerning the external exhibition space where a large part of the ZKM Nam June Paik's holdings had been on display since 23 October of the same year. That very morning at 5:10 AM, the night guard of the premises heard an unbelievably loud bang. It was the implosion of six monitors of *Canopus* (1989), one of Paik's video installations from the collection that dropped to the ground from the wall on which it was installed and was severely damaged.<sup>2</sup> We were all shocked. Through this unfortunate set of events, *Canopus* would contribute to one of the most exciting discussions that I have witnessed in an institutional context relate to the ontology of a *conservation object* and would, simultaneously, confirm my decision to devote myself to thinking about the conservation of media works on a theoretical as well as a practical level.

*Canopus* was created in the late 1980s as one of a series of planets and stars, representing, among others, Mercury, the Earth and the Sun, assembled in Paik's workshop run by Carl Solway in Cincinnati, Ohio, and acquired by Heinrich Klotz for the emerging media art collection of the ZKM in the early 1990s (Fig. 0.1). *Canopus* consists of six small format (8") Sony monitors that play a one-channel video and symmetrically surround a chromed *Oldsmobile* hubcap from the 1970s, inscribed with Korean calligraphy and Paik's signature at the bottom. The investigation of the event produced no clear result. *Canopus* was found shattered on the floor (Fig. 0.2). The technical examination that my colleagues from the conservation department and I carried out revealed that virtually all the elements of the installation were damaged: every one of the vacuum tubes of the six cathode ray tube (CRT) monitors had imploded, their plastic casing scattered and the chromed hubcap revealing a severe deformation (Fig. 0.3). Despite the video data stored on a digital carrier (Compact Flash Media Player) and the supporting structure, which remained quite stable, *Canopus* presented a disastrous picture. A discussion on possible ways to recover the installation was quickly initiated. As I will explain, the case of *Canopus* demonstrated very well the ambivalence

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2 Energie Baden-Württemberg (EnBW) incident report, December 10, 2008. Archive of the ZKM conservation department.

involved in approaching the dual nature of media artworks – as physical artefacts carrying the artist's trace and as performances – as well as ambiguities in the decision-making process.

In-depth discussions and copious consultations with representatives from various departments of the museum centred around the future of *Canopus* and questioned whether the installation should be restored and, if so, to what extent. These debates led to the decision to recover the work. The investigation into the second-hand market of audiovisual equipment in the United States resulted in the possibility of purchasing used, intact tubes and electronic boards to recover the technical functionality of the monitors. Because the new casings diverged in design, the conservation department investigated the feasibility of restoring the damaged casings; indeed, one of the two assistant conservators specialised in plastics. The museum curatorial staff and my departmental colleagues approved the subsequent procedures of restoration as appropriate in the struggle to obliterate any traces of material damage (Figs. 0.4 and 0.5). Yet my investigation into the possibility of the reconstruction of the visual appearance of the hubcap resulted in resistance and confusion among them. To be more precise, the reconstruction of the hubcap aroused strong disapproval among the conservators. My consultation with a specialist in the conservation of metal artefacts determined that the deformations of the hubcap were not 'restorable' – the chrome coating would flake off with even the slightest attempt to smooth out the dents in the surface. Departing from my conviction that the damage to the hubcap diminished the visual appreciation of the installation as a whole (the dents deformed the chrome surface rather decisively) and that this series of Paik's installations did not thematise decay or damage, I proposed a replacement of the hubcap using a second-hand element of exactly the same parameters and appearance, which I was able to acquire after time-consuming research on the American spare-parts market via the online auction website *eBay*. Although as a traditionally trained conservator with skills in copying I was convinced of the technical feasibility, I left open whether and to what degree it would be possible to reproduce the calligraphy and Paik's signature. My proposition was to retain the original hubcap at the museum store and display the installation with replaced monitors and a reconstructed hubcap in the form initially intended by Paik, explaining to the viewer the history of the installation and the decision made, together with technical information about the reproduced elements. My conviction about the accuracy of such a solution lay in the possibility of using the original element – the hubcap – if necessary, while the installation would still address the viewer as it did initially – as a radiant *Canopus* with twinkling electronic images – the brightest star in the southern constellation of Carina and Argo Navis, and the second brightest star in the night-time sky after Sirius – rather than a ruined installation presenting its history, marked with traces and events of its unfortunate past.

My proposition was never realised, and, by the time I left the museum one year later, it was hotly debated as too much of a far-reaching reconstruction presuming, should it be

realised, an attempt at 'fraud' in reproducing the original signature and calligraphy by Paik. In view of the dual nature of such installations – hybrid artworks involving both autographic and allographic elements addressed extensively in this thesis – it becomes clear why my proposal was so wildly debated and, eventually, rejected. Here, the conventional understanding of the 'authenticity' of artworks is associated with nominal authenticity that relates to the origins of the artwork; once an object is 'signed' and carries a trace of the artist, it is untouchable as an 'original' piece, an evidence of his/her activity. *Canopus*, similarly to *Arche Noah* (1989) and other artworks addressed in this thesis, unites in its structure both the elements that are responsible for the performance of the video image – the monitors, and the central element – and the inscribed hubcap, which represents the more traditional piece, a signed sculpture, as it were. The latter functions in the standard conservation approach within the nominal terms of authenticity, while the former is accepted as being variable and therefore more easily exchangeable. The challenge of *Canopus* therefore lies both in recognising its values and their correct proportions and understanding the function of the installation as an entity in order to sustain its appearance for future audiences.

The story of *Canopus* has taught me that when thinking about artworks, we – as conservation and museum professionals – are, on the one hand, operating within the conceptual framework designed for traditional artefacts oriented towards safeguarding the physical material, while on the other, we allow change to take place at the technical level of the installation. If controlled change is permitted when it comes to playback and display equipment, why have such restrictions in relation to other components of artworks? And, if we allow for change to take place, how much of it is permitted while continuing to identify an artwork as still the same, 'authentic,' object, the one 'from before,' without having to say: this is a different piece. In other words, how much modification can an artwork tolerate while retaining its own identity or authenticity? What if an artwork invites change? And what does change tell us about the identity of the artwork? Can change be understood in relation to time, linking the identity of an artwork directly to how we understand time in artworks and in conservation? How does what we know and what we construct about artworks relate to the archive? Can an artwork be conceptualised in relation to a dynamic, evolving and expanding archive?

## **Rationale and Research Question**

Since the emergence of new artistic forms in the 1960s and 70s, the conservation of contemporary art and multimedia installations has become increasingly engaged with

changeable artworks.<sup>3</sup> The story of *Canopus* confronts us with a particular set of questions due to the major changes that took place as the result of an incident, yet, at the same time, it introduces profounder questions about the nature of artworks, the changes they undergo and their relation to how we conceive of an artwork's identity – questions that will continue in a wide range of multimedia installations discussed in this thesis. These artworks inherit changeability as a fundamental characteristic manifested through technological obsolescence, decay, alteration and manipulations in the course of their dissemination, exhibition and conservation processes. Their shifting physical appearance confronts conservation with the necessity to depart from the concerns orientated solely to the artworks' physical constituents and meaning derived from them. For a long time now, this has been the major tenet of conservation, the role of which has been seen chiefly in prolongation of the physical existence of its objects to the future. A paradigm shift has become necessary in order to accept artworks' inherent dynamism and changeability, and to turn away from the standards that rendered museums a material cast of the world and a place of fixation. This shift challenges not only museum collecting practices but also traditional principles of conservation. In current conservation discourse, critical questions concerning whether and how the changeable nature of artworks might be grasped have forced the move beyond the presumptions pertaining to a static museum object and, accompanying it, the utopian search for its ideal condition. The answers to these questions can only be sought where these disciplines meet and it is precisely at these crossovers that my thesis has been developed.

This thesis poses questions that consider the constitution of 'conservation objects' in relation to our understanding of what an artwork is and how it functions within and beyond a certain historical moment. Furthermore, it is to consider the implications of the transformation of multimedia artworks for how we engage with their nature and behaviour. Departing from issues involved in conservation, and looking through the prism of the history of techniques, material culture studies and my professional background as a conservator, I pose questions with both philosophical and historical ramifications concerning what, in the case of multimedia artworks and installations, the artwork is in relation to the change it experiences and how this might affect our understanding of time in which and as which the change occurs. A crucial role in this discussion is played by the rethinking of time in conservation through its intrinsically changeable 'objects,' as well as by the consideration of the archive as a final destination of multimedia artworks, but also as their beginning.

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3 Among the first publications concerned with new theoretical and practical approaches to contemporary materials, one may find Heinz Althöfer, *Restaurierung moderner Kunst: Das Düsseldorfer Symposium* (Düsseldorf: Restaurierungszentrum Düsseldorf, 1977) and proceedings from the ICOM 5<sup>th</sup> Triennial Meeting in Zagreb in 1978. For the evolution of this debate, see Oscar Chiantore and Antonia Rava, *Conserving Contemporary Art: Issues, Methods, Materials and Research* (Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute, 2012), 56-57.

## Frame of Reference and Definitions

I define multimedia installations as art forms that are intrinsically compound objects comprised of a series of heterogeneous elements – technology-based and organic media, photographs, sculptural components and painting. Different from the definition of installation art shaped by site as part of their experience (Minimal art, Earthwork and environment), the term ‘multimedia installations’ leans towards the cyclical principle of their de- and re-materialisations that mark different phases of their trajectories.<sup>4</sup> Although they take note of the perimeter of the space they reconfigure, the multimedia installations discussed here are primarily heterotemporal entities and hybrid assemblages of materials that are installed and re-installed on the basis of the archive.<sup>5</sup> The term ‘multimedia installations’ proposes an alternative to the notions of ‘technology-based installation art’ and ‘time-based media installations’ and acknowledges the multifaceted nature of multimedia – as artworks characterised by both the performance and the physical objecthood of their components.<sup>6</sup> In this thesis the notion of ‘time-based’ media will encompass the ways in which media respond to time with possible implications for all artworks.

I propose to employ the notion of changeability to denote an artwork’s potentiality to change under the consideration of aspects of time in which the change occurs. The term changeability is broader than the term ‘variability,’<sup>7</sup> which implies sameness rather than difference and variation within set parameters. Encompassing extrinsic and intrinsic change,

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4 Installation art as a term related to both the medium and a set of practices is a hybrid notion that can only tentatively be related to what Erica Suderberg describes as a genre informed by set design, Zen garden, soft architecture, happening, bricollage, spectacles, multimedia projections, shrines, earth works, eighteenth and nineteenth-century panoramas, *Wunderkammern*, *cabineets de curiosité* and Arte Povera. Erica Suderberg, *Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 1-22. I avoid the term ‘video sculpture,’ which leans on the normative museum tradition related to traditional art such as painting and sculpture. Paik himself dismissed this term associating it with sculpture, which he found appropriate for works ‘enclosed’ in themselves, such as those by Shigeo Kubota. Although for him the word ‘installation’ was also ‘not really chic’ – he associated it in German with sanitary installations – I nevertheless decided to use it consistently as ‘multimedia installations’ throughout this thesis. For the terminology used by Paik, see David Ross, “Im Gespräch mit Nam June Paik,” in *Nam June Paik: Video Time – Video Space*, eds. Toni Stooss and Thomas Kellein (Ostfildern-Ruit: Edition Cantz, 1991), 58.

5 Suderberg addresses the relation of the noun ‘installation’ to the verb ‘to install.’ Suderberg, *Space, Site, Intervention*, 4. Furthermore, for a discussion on installation as an end product and as a process of a temporal fixation of the object, see Peter Osborn, “Installation, Performance, or What?” *Oxford Art Journal* Vol.24, No. 2 (2001): 150.

6 For the term ‘technology-based installation art’ see William A. Real, “Towards the Guidelines for Practice in the Preservation and Documentation of Technology-Based Installation Art,” *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation* 40 (2001): 207-225. For the term ‘time-based media installation’ in relation to works that incorporate a video, slide, film, audio or computer-based element, see Pip Laurenson, “Authenticity, Change and Loss in the Conservation of Time-Based Media Installations” *Tate Papers* 6 (2006), accessed December 12, 2011, [www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/7401](http://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/7401).

7 In conservation, the term ‘variability’ was coined by the *Variable Media Initiative*. In this thesis, unless relevant in the context, this term is used only to indicate variants of instantiations based on a score in relation to musical performance and in direct quotations from Paik.

and independently of its desirability and the questions of judgement, changeability goes beyond any reference to some kind of a mean value and may involve a fundamental change as a historical practice.

I define a concept as a concretisation of an artist's idea(s) that may be conveyed in an instruction or score. This will become a condition of possibility of artworks' manifestations and, reciprocally, these manifestations will shape a work's further development on a conceptual level. The artwork's materiality will encompass the entangled relationships between the artwork's various manifestations and its concept.

In this thesis, I propose a new theoretical engagement with time in the conservation of multimedia artworks, which may have implications for other media. I am interested in the construction of the identity of multimedia artworks in relation to time, yet time other than the common understanding of the 'passage of time' and often conflated with the mode of its measurement. In particular, I test the implementation of Bergsonian *durée* as a concept of time that supplements the time of decay and ageing in the conservation of multimedia artworks. Moreover, the kind of time I discuss is intrinsic to artworks and their constitutive media; it also provokes a reconsideration of the concept of time, which lies at the ground of conservation and which allows for conceiving of a temporal materiality of media.

I propose to engage with the notion of the archive that involves and yet goes beyond its physical domain as a sheer repository of documents and materials. Here, the concept of the archive implies an engagement with both its physical and non-physical sphere. This concept is crucial for the way in which multimedia artworks acquire their identity in the process of actualisation on the basis of the archive.

The term 'conservation object' as used throughout this thesis refers to a quality of an artwork as a subject of conservation's research and practices. In traditional conservation, the conservation object has often been associated with an object of the Enlightenment that was believed to be sufficiently scrutinised through scientific analysis.<sup>8</sup> In this thesis, however, the term 'conservation object' emphasises the context of conservation in which the artwork is being conceptualised – a product of an intentional activity of a conservator, as it were. However, by using this term it is also my intention to criticise the objectification of such an artwork, echoing the stasis of a 'museum object' and its reduction to a particular 'state' or 'condition' discernable by observation, measurement and analysis,<sup>9</sup> rather than comprehending it in a system of relations. Artworks, as I will demonstrate, are more than just 'objects.' Rather,

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8      Laurenson, "Authenticity, Change and Loss;" Salvador Muñoz Viñas, *Contemporary Theory of Conservation*, Oxford: Elsevier, 2005, 3. According to Muñoz Viñas it was only during the Enlightenment that science 'became the primary way to reveal and avail truths,' which coincided with public access to art and culture. Furthermore, he explains that artworks and artists acquired special recognition further through Romanticism (special role of an artist and exaltation of ruins) and nationalism (cult of monuments as national symbols). *Ibid.*

9      Laurenson, "Authenticity, Change and Loss."

they are products of humans and their culture; they are dynamic entities, the materiality of which can only be defined in an entangled network of relations and under the consideration of social and temporal aspects.<sup>10</sup>

## Conservation Theory: Between Tradition and the Innovation

To define the borderlines between new and traditional conservation is a difficult task.<sup>11</sup> Whereas a range of activities in the conservation of contemporary art and multimedia installations relate to a specific, innovative practice, this does not automatically exclude reverberations of traditional theory that are still present in them. To be sure, many of these works *prima facie* call for a particular approach both in practice and in theory, yet the desirability of such an approach does not always respond to the implementation of a new theoretical framework. Experience drawn from years of professional practice and this research has showed me that conservation, even ‘narrowed down’ to an engagement with contemporary art, is a strongly heterogeneous field, and that it depends on culture and context. So what I later call the ‘culture of conservation’ (section 5.7 and 9.6) shaped by geographical location, language, institution, training and even personal skill and competence on a micro level, has an undeniable impact on *modi operandi* in conservation’s theory and practice.

Conservation theory is a minefield of meanings densely populated with a variety of interpretations. Whereas only few decided to articulate their theoretical propositions under the banner of ‘theory of conservation,’ many scholars and practitioners nonetheless partake in the theoretical discourse. To move between various forms of theoretical concretisation and tacit theoretical ‘knowing’ within conservation communities is a risky manoeuvre. If only to critically reconsider conservation’s understanding of its ‘object,’ time and archive, of necessity, this thesis confronts this risk.

At this point, it is important to explain my own theoretical background. My thinking was shaped by traditional conservation training influenced by Italian (Brandian)

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10 While the temporal aspects as I address them in this thesis have not found much attention in professional literature, for the ‘social’ in conservation see, for instance, Miriam Clavir, *Preserving What is Valued: Museum, Conservation and First Nations* (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press, 2002); Miriam Clavir, “Social Contexts for Conservation: Time, Distance, and Voice in Museums and Galleries,” *Journal of the Canadian Association for Conservation* 34 (2009); Glenn Wharton, “Heritage Conservation as Cultural Work: Public Negotiation of a Pacific Hero” (Ph.D diss., University College London, 2004). For the relationship between social and cultural perspectives in conservation, see Miriam Clavir, “Conservation and Cultural Significance,” in *Conservation: Principles, Dilemmas and Uncomfortable Truths*, eds. Alison Richmond and Alison Bracker (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2009), 139-149; for a construction of the ‘conservation object’ from the perspective of Science and Technology Studies see Ijsbrand Hummelen, “Conservation and Technical Mediation: Technological Mediation and Materiality in the Conservation Practice of Modern and Contemporary Art,” *New Strategies in the Conservation of Contemporary Art*, accessed January 10, 2012, [www.newstrategiesinconservation.nl/projects/87](http://www.newstrategiesinconservation.nl/projects/87).

11 Throughout this thesis, unless relevant in the context, the term ‘conservation’ replaces the terms ‘conservation-restoration’ often used in South and Central Europe. See also section 6.1.

conservation tradition, aestheticism and technical-analytical skill at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, pragmatism and scientific rigour at the University of Applied Sciences in Cologne and conservation culture of the Istituto Centrale per il Restauro in Rome (currently L'Istituto Superiore per la Conservazione ed il Restauro). Despite this traditional background, my generation matured in the spirit of questioning paradigms of traditional conservation, growing interests in contemporary and modern art (symposium and publication *Modern Art Who Cares?*, 1997 and 1999) and new ways of approaching 'new media'.<sup>12</sup>

Nonetheless in this pre-shaped professional landscape, and amid the vast number of publications, conferences and seminars, I believe that conservation still seeks to define itself at the crossroads between theory and practice, in between curation, installation practice and creativity, and that the grounds for a new conservation – and perhaps a new conservation philosophy – still have to be laid.

I refer to traditional conservation theory as having been established in the context of the restoration of artworks that are conceived as unique objects (often in a singular medium) and as the creation of an artist-as-genius – its beginning with Vasari<sup>13</sup> and culmination in Romanticism – and linked with that intentionality. The crystallisation of fine art conservation theories were preceded by theories of architectural restoration laid out by Eugène-Emmanuel Voillet-le-Duc in France (restoration 'in style of') and opposed in Britain by John Ruskin and William Morris (historic preservation), but also elsewhere by Alois Riegl (theory of values) and Camillo Boito (philological conservation).<sup>14</sup> Although the past century has brought various theoretical voices into the field (Dehlio, Baldini, Conti, Philippot), the historical and aesthetic dimension of restoration found its major expression in the theory formulated and published by an Italian art critic and historian Cesare Brandi in 1963.<sup>15</sup> In his *Theory of Restoration*, Brandi assigns a high eminence to the historical, material authenticity of the artwork.<sup>16</sup> Using the principles of *Gestalt* psychology, he sees an artwork as a set of relationships between its constituents, rather than their sheer sum, and bases his theory on the presumption of the univocality of artistic intent. Brandian axioms are rather succinct, he postulates, among others, the minimisation of the randomness of taste and subjectivity in the process of making

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12 Manifest in writings by Laursen, Jon Ippolito, Alain Depocas and others.

13 I refer to the concept rather than the literary sense of the contemporary word 'artist'; instead, Vasari's subject is referred to as an *artefice* (artificer).

14 Paul Philippot, "Restoration From the Perspective of the Humanities," in *Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage*, eds. Nicholas Stanley Price et al. (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Trust, 1996), 217.

15 Theory of Restoration (*Theoria del Restauro*) was an essay that outlined the theoretical and practical framework for restoration, which also included guidelines on what is ethically acceptable and unacceptable in restoration. Cesare Brandi, *Theory of Restoration*, trans. Cynthia Rockwell (Nardini Editore: Florence, 2005), 62.

16 Helen Glanville, introduction to *The History of the Restoration and Conservation of Works of Art* by Alessandro Conti, trans. Helen Glanville (London: Elsevier, 2007), xx.

a decision, the unacceptability of creative conservation and the prohibition of entering the time of creation.<sup>17</sup> He further advocates a complete reversibility of a restoration work – a recognisability of the lacunae – and proposes respect towards the history of an artwork. The founding principle of his theory was the concept of unity (non-divisibility into constitutive elements) of an artwork; he further conceived of an artwork in the relation between the ‘aspect’ (*aspetto*) and structure (*struttura*, subject to restoration).<sup>18</sup> Although the impact of Brandian thought has since been influential for the professional field, traditional conservation cannot be seen as homogeneous. The so-called Ruhemann-Gombrich debate published in *The Burlington Magazine* in 1963, which centred around the controversy that arose due to the cleaning performed on the paintings of the National Portrait Gallery in London, revealed that the apprehension of values in conservation may conflict with facts derived from scientific analysis.<sup>19</sup> The introduction of scientific analysis to the field resulted in the establishment of conservation-restoration as an exact science rooted in the nineteenth-century conviction that truth about objects can be revealed through science;<sup>20</sup> it also allowed for the separation of conservation from a working-class artisanship.<sup>21</sup> Such (traditional) conservation strives to enforce ‘truth’ conveyed in the object, usually related to its integrity (physical, historical and aesthetical).<sup>22</sup> The ability of gaining objective knowledge through scientific analysis led to the establishment of a notion of ‘original object’ and ‘original condition.’<sup>23</sup> It can be said that this eventually led to the view that rendered artworks static in the attempt to arrest change. Traditional conservation theory added to these dicta that of ‘minimal intervention’, which was regarded as a fundamental principle in the 1970s and has strongly guided conservation practices ever since.<sup>24</sup> The term is closely associated with the term of ‘reversibility’ – both derivatives of a positivist belief in objectivity.<sup>25</sup>

17 For an overview of Brandian axioms, see Sebastiano Barassi, “Dreaming of a Universal Approach: Brandi’s *Theory of Restoration* and the Conservation of Contemporary Art” (paper presented at the seminar *Conservation, Principles, Dilemmas and Uncomfortable Truths*, Royal Academy of Arts, September 24, 2009).

18 The German translation discerns between ‘Aussehen’ and ‘Stuktur.’ Cesare Brandi, *Theorie der Restaurierung*, transl. Ursula Schädler-Saub and Dörthe Jakobs, *ICOMOS Hefte des Deutschen Nationalkomitees* XLI (2006).

19 The National Gallery cleaning controversy, also known as the Ruhemann-Gombrich debate, revolved around the cleaning of paintings and issues of intentionality. It is considered crucial as an example of the rapture between the scientific and technologically driven approach, and the attitudes emphasising the validity of historic and artistic argumentations (including the ageing and patina and involving comparative, observational methods). See Cesare Brandi, “The Cleaning of Pictures in Relation to Patina, Varnish and Glazes,” *The Burlington Magazine* 91, no. 556 (1949): 183-189.

20 Laurenson, “Authenticity, Change and Loss;” Muñoz Viñas, *Contemporary Theory of Conservation.*”

21 Philippot, “Restoration From the Perspective of the Humanities,” 217.

22 Clavir, *Preserving What is Valued*; Muñoz Viñas, *Contemporary Theory of Conservation*, 65-66; Laurenson, “Authenticity, Change and Loss.”

23 Caroline Villers, “Post Minimal Intervention” *The Conservator* 28 (2004), 3-10; Laurenson, “Authenticity, Change and Loss.”

24 Villers, “Post Minimal Intervention.”

25 Ibid.

The distinction between traditional conservation and ‘contemporary conservation theory’ was clearly articulated by Salvador Muñoz Viñas in 2005 (she speaks of ‘classical’, instead of ‘traditional’); in the field of conservation of time-based media installations the distanciation from traditional conservation and its ‘object’ was undertaken by Pip Laurenson in 2006 and 2011.<sup>26</sup> This thesis builds strongly upon these tendencies and is intended as a continuation and expansion of them. Rather than dismissing the old, it contextualises both the tradition of scientific approach (the necessity to study materials) and Brandian heritage, if only in acknowledging relations in artworks rather than just hard facts and following the definition of conservation as a methodological moment of recognition of a work of art in its aesthetic and physical being.<sup>27</sup>

## One Artist, Manifold Interrogations

Whether traditional or recent, conservation has long been challenged by a well known, and yet, from conservation’s perspective, unresolved, artistic oeuvre. This thesis is centred around Nam June Paik (1932–2006) as one of the most manifold media artists when it comes to his selection of material, constant readiness to test the implementation of new technologies and cross-boundary activities. His oeuvre encompassing global communication systems and the combination of obsolescence and chance with the high-end technical solutions of his time pose the most challenging dilemmas at the crossroads of curation and conservation, which are exemplary for the diversity of media works in collections. This variety of media and their patterns of historical change were crucial in my decision to focus this thesis on the oeuvre of a singular artist. It can be said, that as no other artist and as a representative of ‘proto new media,’ Paik is a key figure in relation to the questions of presentation, maintenance and conservation of media art in the institutional domain.<sup>28</sup> At this point, in order to reveal what is at stake, it is important to explain that, at the time of writing this thesis, only a few works by Paik remained in the same shape as they were conceived and virtually none of his works that function today are displayed with their initial playback equipment. The rapid cycles of obsolescence to which technology-based media are exposed provoke those questions that

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26 Muñoz Viñas, *Contemporary Theory of Conservation*;" Laurenson, “Authenticity, Change and Loss;" Laurenson, “Shifting Structures, Identity and Change in the Conservation and Management of Time-Based Media Works of Art,” (PhD diss., University College London, 2011). Although not strictly a conservation theory, I would like to acknowledge the influence of the intellectual work of heritage theorist David Lowenthal on present-day thinking in conservation.

27 For the ‘methodological moment,’ see Brandi, *Theory of Restoration*, 48.

28 I introduce the term ‘proto new media’ as media characterised by the anticipation of the use of technologies including the Internet and new forms of global communication. Paik was a forerunner of the implementation of new media in visual arts in relation to how he used the concepts of connectability, network and global communication, including his seminal video *Global Groove* (1973), the project *Electronic Superhighway* (submitted to Rockefeller foundation in 1974, satellite broadcast such as *Good Morning Mr. Orwell* (1984) or *Bye, Bye Kipling* (1986), to name but a few.

arise from the reinstallation of components in updated formats, along with the emulation and migration of their data and carriers – aspects familiar to all media installations in collections.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, in the phase of pre-production, production and, later, maintenance, through the interdisciplinary network of collaborators, fabricators and mentors, Paik's artworks are bound in social relations and exemplify how people's lives can be engaged with material culture and how artefacts mediate social relationships.<sup>30</sup>

Paik's legacy in the history of twentieth-century art was his introduction of TV and video as an artistic medium in the 1960s. His artistic achievement, discussed in the first section of this thesis, must be considered in light of the emergence of new artistic forms of media art, in which he takes on the role of a forerunner. Paik was born in Korea in 1932 and grew up in a wealthy family. In 1950, he and his father fled from the imminent Korean War first to Hong Kong and later to Japan. After finishing his studies in music, art history and aesthetics at the University of Tokyo, he moved to Germany in 1956 and continued to study composition and Western music at the Universities of Munich and Freiburg. In 1959, he travelled to Cologne to pursue his interest in electronic music and, later, New Music in Darmstadt. In 1957, he met Karlheinz Stockhausen and, one year later, John Cage – perhaps two of the most significant encounters of his artistic carrier. In 1964, he moved to New York, where he remained for more than forty years.<sup>31</sup> Later in this thesis, these biographical connections will be developed in the relation of media art to music.

One of Paik's greatest innovations in terms of art production – but also a challenge in conservation – was that of departing from the rigid notion of a singular authentic object and releasing his work through the production of numerous versions, variations and clones. Moreover, Paik's creative process had an open-ended character, allowing for modifications and interventions long after his artworks began their institutional life as part of museum collections. His art illustrates how the transitory character of new technologies challenges the common understanding of a physical art object and how uniqueness and singularity are being

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29 As a preservation strategy, emulation aims at imitating the original appearance of the work as closely as possible to the version considered as point of reference, for example by implementation of a new or other playback and/or display equipment. In digital media, emulation is a means of imitating the function of an old system on a new one. Migration stands for the process of upgrading the equipment and source material. For instance, the DOCAM and Variable Media Glossary designates migration as a change of traditional cathode ray tube TV sets in Paik's *Royal Canadian Mounted Police* to LCD or plasma screens. Alain Depocas, Jon Ippolito and Caitlin Jones, "Variable Media Glossary" (2003), accessed December 12, 2012, [www.variablemedia.net/pdf/Glossary\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.variablemedia.net/pdf/Glossary_ENG.pdf). As I indicated elsewhere, there is no specific differentiation between the vocabulary applied to the purely carrier and material-based aspects of a digital work, for instance, and its encoded content. Hanna Hölling, "Versions, Variations, and Variability: Ethical Considerations and Conservation Options for Computer-Based Art," *Electronic Media Review of the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works* (Washington: American Institute for Conservation, forthcoming).

30 Artworks may have, following Alfred Gell, an agency of their own. Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

31 Paik died in Miami, on January 29, 2006.

relinquished in favour of the multitude of objects employed in many versions. According to this, conservation of Paik's oeuvre becomes primarily the process of acknowledging change and ensuring the intrinsic fluidity of artworks within the limits of their identity.

Although present throughout this thesis, Paik's voice left a vast number of possibilities for interpretation when it comes to questions of the conservation of his legacy. This is also why, from the conservation point of view, it is so fascinating and, simultaneously, highly challenging to undertake a journey following his artistic footsteps.

## Present Debates and Emerging Challenges

In academic and professional conservation literature, a great deal of attention has been paid to the recent, non-traditional, multimedia media artworks and installations incorporating heterogeneous elements and technology. In referring to these, this thesis draws from the work of many researchers, scholars and conservators preoccupied with these themes without which a further development of conceptualisation of multimedia works of art would not be possible.

The conservation problems that arise from dealing with variable and changeable artefacts, and temporally and spatially specific installations with or without technological components, have been addressed in a number of conferences and symposia, such as *Contemporary Art: Who Cares?* (Amsterdam, 9 – 11 June 2010), its predecessor *Modern Art: Who Cares?* (Amsterdam, 8 – 10 September 1997), *The Object in Transition* (Los Angeles, 24 – 26 January 2008) and various research projects such *Inside Installations* (2004–2007), and, particularly dealing with problems of conservation and documentation of media art in a broader sense were *Matters in Media Art: Collaborating Towards the Care of Time-Based Media* (2003–2015), *Documentation and Conservation of the Media Arts Heritage | DOCAM Research Alliance* (2005–2010), *Variable Media Network* (1999–2003), *ActiveArchive I.-III.* (2004–2011), *Obsolete Equipment Project* (2009–2011) and the *Digital Oblivion* (2010–2011).<sup>32</sup> A significant contribution to the understanding of these art forms with relation to the notion of authenticity applied in Western aesthetics were seminal publications such as the essay *Authenticity, Change and Loss in the Conservation of Time-Based Media Installations* authored by Laurensen and the edited volumes *Inside Installations: Theory and Practice in the Care of Complex Artworks* and *Conservation: Principles, Dilemmas and Uncomfortable Truths* with contributions related to understanding installation art in exhibition practice by Glenn

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32 Further conferences related to the topic include: *From Marble to Chocolate* (1995, Tate London), *Mortality Immortality? A Conference of Contemporary Preservation Issues* (1998, Getty Conservation Institute), *The Object in Transition: A Cross Disciplinary Conference on the Preservation and Study of Modern and Contemporary Art* (2008, Getty Conservation Institute and the Getty Research Institute).

Wharton, Jill Sterrett and Tina Fiske.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, much thinking was accomplished in doctoral dissertations such as *Doing Artworks* by Vivian van Saaze (2009), *Harming Works of Art* by Iris Kapelouzou (2010), *Shifting Structures, Identity and Change in the Conservation and Management of Time-Based Media Works of Art* by Pip Laurenson (2011) and *Scripting Artworks* by Arianne Noël de Tilly (2012).<sup>34</sup> Aspects of exhibition and preservation media and video art were addressed in edited volumes such as *New Media in the White Cube and Beyond* (2008) by Christiane Paul, two volumes *40 Jahre Videokunst* (in 2007 by Wulf Herzogenrath and Rudolf Frieling and in 2010 by Christoph Blase and Peter Weibel) and the recent co-edited volume *Preserving and Exhibiting Media Art: Challenges and Perspectives* (2013).<sup>35</sup> Although published nearly two decades ago on the occasion of a symposium at the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg (25 November 1995), the book *Wie haltbar ist Videokunst? How Durable is Video Art?* (1995) should not be left unmentioned. The author is concerned with, among other issues, the preservation of Paik's oeuvre, relevant in the context of my thesis.<sup>36</sup> Also worth mentioning is the publication of the *Variable Media Network* entitled *Permanence Through Change* (2003), which includes essays that engage with practically oriented discussions on the preservation of digital, dynamic works (including Paik's *TV Garden*).<sup>37</sup> In the context of capturing, presenting and storing media art, the co-edited volume *Present, Continuous, Past: Media Strategies of Presentation, Mediation and Dissemination* (2005) provides a valuable spectrum of thinking on the subject.<sup>38</sup> Last but not least, I should mention the publication *Schweizer Videokunst der 1970er und 1980er Jahre: Eine Rekonstruktion* (2009), which problematises historically informed reconstructions in video installations.<sup>39</sup>

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- 33 Laurenson, "Authenticity, Change and Loss;" Alison Richmond and Alison Bracker eds., *Conservation: Principles, Dilemmas and Uncomfortable Truths* (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2009); Tatja Scholte and Glenn Wharton, eds., *Inside Installations: Theory and Practice in the Care of Complex Artworks* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press), 69-80.
- 34 Ariane Noël de Tilly, "Scripting Artworks: Studying the Socialization of Edited Video and Film Installations," (PhD diss., University of Amsterdam, 2011); Vivian van Saaze, "Doing Artworks: A Study Into the Presentation and Conservation of Installation Artworks," (PhD diss. Maastricht University, 2009); Laurenson, "Shifting Structures, Identity and Change."
- 35 Christiane Paul, ed., *New Media in the White Cube and Beyond – Curatorial Models for Digital Art* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2008); Rudolf Frieling and Wulf Herzogenrath, eds., *40 Jahre Videokunst.de: Digitales Erbe; Videokunst in Deutschland von 1963 bis heute* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2006); Peter Weibel and Christoph Blase, eds., *Record again! 40 Jahre Videokunst.de Teil 2* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010); Vinzenz Hediger, Barbara Le Maitre and Julia Noordegraaf, eds., *Preserving and Exhibiting Media Art: Challenges and Perspectives* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013).
- 36 Bärbel Otterbeck and Christian Scheidemann, eds., *Wie haltbar ist Videokunst? How Durable is Video Art?* (Wolfsburg: Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, 1995).
- 37 Alain Depocas, Jon Ippolito and Caitlin Jones, ed., *Permanence Through Change: The Variable Media Approach* (New York and Montreal: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation & The Daniel Langlois Foundation for Art, Science and Technology, 2003).
- 38 Ursula Frohne, Mona Schieren and Jean-François Guiton, *Present, Continuous, Past: Media Strategies of Presentation, Mediation and Dissemination* (Wien and New York: Springer, 2005).
- 39 Irene Schubiger and AktiveArchive, eds., *Schweizer Videokunst der 1970er und 1980er Jahre: Eine Rekonstruktion* (Zürich: JRP Ringier, 2009).

It is also important to acknowledge a number of exhibitions and discussions related Paik's oeuvre that have addressed, sometimes indirectly, aspects of the conservation of his works, such as the two retrospectives in Düsseldorf (*Nam June Paik: Retrospective*, Museum Kunst Palast, 11 September 2010 – 21 November 2010) and Liverpool (*Nam June Paik: Video Artist, Performance Artist, Composer and Visionary*, Tate Liverpool and FACT, 17 December 2010 – 13 March 2011), as did the recent exhibition *Nam June Paik: Global Visionary* at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington (13 December 2012 – 11 August 2013). I should also mention the exhibition *Seeing Double* (19 March – 16 May 2004) at the Guggenheim Museum, New York, which was an outcome of the aforementioned *Variable Media Network* and which explicitly addressed the issues of conservation of Paik's *TV Garden*. Last but not least, a considerable number of conferences and panels have addressed the conservation of Paik's media, for instance the panel *Preserving Nam June Paik's Video Installations: The Importance of the Artist's Voice* at the MoMA on 16 February 2007 and various symposia at the Nam June Paik Art Center in Seoul concerned with conservation, including the recent *Gift of Nam June Paik 5: Man-Machine Duet for Life* (12 October 2012).

All in all, the discussion rooted in the conservation of media works of art already has a considerable tradition, which is continued in this thesis by expanding upon several notions and offering a new perspective on aspects that have never been scrutinised before in this form.

For instance, my discussion on the relation between media art and early conceptual art is related to Edward Shanken's argument that bridges tendencies in conceptual art and technology-based media.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, I seek to enrich the discussion on ontological nearness of musical performance and multimedia installations put forward by Laurenson and expanded upon by Richard Rinehart in the proposed system of notational documentation.<sup>41</sup> Laurenson's essay is served by the theory of musical performance by Stephen Davies and the theory of symbols by Nelson Goodman, which resonate in this thesis in the consideration of the duality of the performed and sculptural elements in multimedia installations.<sup>42</sup> The musical association and Goodman's distinction of autographic (forgeable) and allographic (unforgeable) art is enhanced by related questions of the historical instrumentalisation in relation to the artist's intention addressed by Richard Taruskin and Randall R. Dipert.<sup>43</sup> Last but not least, the aspects of performativity proposed, among others, by J.L. Austin (performative as

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40 Edward Shanken, "Art in the Information Age: Technology and Conceptual Art," *Leonardo* 35/ 4 (2002): 433-438.

41 Laurenson, "Authenticity, Change and Loss;" Richard Rinehart, "The Media Art Notation System: Documenting and Preserving Digital/Media Art" *Leonardo* Vol. 40, No. 2 (2007): 181-187.

42 Stephen Davies, *Musical Works and Performances: A Philosophical Exploration* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001); Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co, 1976).

43 Richard Taruskin, *Text and Act: Essays on Music and Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Randall R. Dipert, "Types and Tokens: A Reply to Sharpe," *Mind* 89 (1980): 587-588.

‘doing something’ in relation to constative as describing a set of affairs), serves to explain how an object may shift its status by the artist’s declaration once its performance has concluded.<sup>44</sup>

Although the changeable character of multimedia artworks was studied profoundly and became gradually acknowledged in conservation, there was little attention paid to the nature of the very change. Up until this moment, the acknowledgement of the changeability of artworks has not resulted in rethinking the concept of time in conservation. My thesis is conceived to fill this gap. At its outset, changeability occurs both as seen from the point of view of an observer (researcher) or an instigator (conservator), and is analysed in relation to time. Both change and time – involved in artworks as processes, performances and objects – relate to the identity of artworks that occupies a central position in this thesis. In time-based installations, the shift from material object – its ‘state’ or ‘condition’ – to the discussion of its identity has been pioneered in the aforementioned essay by Laurenson.<sup>45</sup> In a different way, the aspect of the identity of works of art in relation to change with a special emphasis on the status of works as ‘heritage’ has been taken up in the doctoral dissertation *Harming Works of Art* by Kapelouzou.<sup>46</sup> From another perspective and commenting on the various remediations of the same artwork, Noël de Tilly studies the identity of film and video installations ‘as a continuum.’<sup>47</sup> As a form of a continuation of the discourse on identity, van Saaze puts forward the shift towards a ‘process-oriented’ and – in my view – dynamic notion of authenticity.<sup>48</sup> From a different perspective, and relevant for my discussion on time, Kapelouzou takes a further step and explores the possibilities of locating the identity of contemporary artefacts through the application of four-dimensionalism.<sup>49</sup> However, she leaves open the question whether a common ontology based on this concept of time-space may be applied to all works of art. Yet what lies beyond these notions – processuality and change – what is and where may we search for the concept of time that underpins conservation?

Conservation literature does not address the aspect of time directly; rather, time underpins conservation and its theories somewhat implicitly. For instance, when we turn to classical examples of conservation literature, the idea of the uniqueness of a historical moment may already be found in writings by Ruskin in relation to built heritage.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, Riegl put

44 J.L. Austin *How to Do Things With Words* (Harvard: President and Fellows of Harvard College, 1962).

45 She refers to the ‘work defining properties’ derived from the philosophy of music. Laurenson, “Authenticity, Change and Loss;” and Laurenson, “Shifting Structures, Identity and Change,” 233-268.

46 Iris Kapelouzou “Harming Works of Art: The Challenges of Contemporary Conceptions of the Artwork” (PhD diss., Royal College of Art London, 2010).

47 Noël de Tilly, “Scripting Artworks,” 51.

48 Van Saaze, “Doing Artworks.”

49 Kapelouzou, “Harming Works of Art,” 118-119.

50 John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (London: Smith, Elder and Co, 1849).

forward the concept of a monument situated in a historically distant past.<sup>51</sup> An implicit concept of time in adapting diverging temporalities of the building and the present may also be seen in the opus of Viollet-le-Duc.<sup>52</sup> Some thirty years later, leaning on historicism, Brandi's theory emphasised the uniqueness of the moment of creation and the impossibility of returning to the past.<sup>53</sup> More recently, it was Caroline Villers and Muñoz Viñas who explicitly addressed the irreversibility of conservation actions.<sup>54</sup> Again, the aspect of time underpins each of these considerations in an unexplicated matter, surfacing only seldom in an articulated form. This thesis aims to fill this gap through a profound reconsideration of the concept of time lying implicitly at the grounds of conservation.

The aspect of time and changeability in conservation directs us to the concept of the archive that harbours the identity of artworks and concludes this thesis. Although I have familiarised myself with a number of theories of the archive, I would also like to point to the concepts of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Sven Spiekier as influential in the development of my thinking. Among a wide range of publications, Charles Merewether's book *The Archive* (2006) comprises a representative plethora of essays that deliver a solid foundation on which to base my archival explorations.<sup>55</sup> Yet the archival compulsion of the recent decade in academic research, and exhibition and artistic practices seems to have bypassed the field of conservation. In conservation literature, the archive has often been addressed in relation to a repository of documents, archival documentation or artists' archives. Similarly to the aspect of time, the concept of the archive other than physical space and collection of data seems to have submerged in the interrogation of technical-documentary detail. It is often the issue of – nonetheless most important, yet not exhaustive – practicalities of documentation that is associated with the archive and/or its creation one way or another.<sup>56</sup> More explicitly, the archive's role in the re-creation of works has been addressed on the occasion of the Swiss project *AktiveArchive* that took on the role of the archive in re-installation practices using examples of early Swiss video art.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, the Dutch conservator and RCE senior

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51 Alois Riegl, *Der moderne Denkmalkultus: Sein Wesen und seine Entstehung* (1923). For the English translation of the eponymous essay from this book, see Alois Riegl, "The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Essence and Development," in *Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage*, eds. Nicholas Stanley Price et al. (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Trust, 1996), 69-83.

52 Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du XI<sup>e</sup> au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle, 1854-1868* (Oxford University: A. Morel, 1874).

53 Brandi, *Theory of Restoration*.

54 Villers, "Post Minimal Intervention;" Muñoz Viñas, *Contemporary Theory of Conservation*.

55 Charles Merewether, ed., *The Archive, Documents of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press; London, Whitechapel Gallery, 2006).

56 See, for instance, Part IV in the edited volume *Inside Installations..* In this respect it is important to acknowledge the INCCA database and its Artists' Archives.

57 The project *AktiveArchive* (HKB Bern, SIK Zürich, BAK) resulted in the exhibition *Swiss Video Art from the 1970s and 1980s: a Reconstruction*, curated by Johannes Gfeller and Irene Schubiger at the Kunstmuseum Luzern 15 March – 4 May 2008. See Schubiger and *AktiveArchive*, eds., *Schweizer Videokunst der 1970er und 1980er Jahre*.

researcher Ijsbrand Hummelen points to the role of the archive of documentation with a ‘future behaviour in mind.’<sup>58</sup> The registration of artistic practices in the form of interviews and securing traces that are ‘made’ during documentation procedure is, according to Hummelen, intrinsic to contemporary art conservation practices. Although indirectly connected to the archive, the role of prescriptions and instructions in re-installation procedures has surfaced in Noël de Tilly’s doctoral thesis *Scripting Artworks*.<sup>59</sup> In analysing the re-installation procedures of editioned video installations, de Tilly emphasises the role of the interpretation of the series of prescriptions accompanying these practices. Of interest to my argument, however, remains her view on these artworks as finding their manifestation in many instantiations over time and thus constantly redefining their identity.<sup>60</sup> In this way, and towards the written narrative, Noël de Tilly expands the understanding of identity of time-based works posited by Laurenson as ‘defined by a cluster of work-defining properties which will include the artist’s instructions, artist-approved installations intended to act as models, an understanding of the context in which they were made, and the willingness and ability of those acting as custodians of the work to be sensitive in the realisation of a good installation.’<sup>61</sup> Noël de Tilly’s notion of scripting as a methodological tool enabling us to understand the conditions and role of different agents in the socialisation of an editioned work will, in my account, take the form of a conservation narrative – a concept based on storytelling that enables the connection of different temporal dimensions that partake in shaping an artwork’s identity in their engagement with the archive. The redefinition of artworks manifest in different instantiations as put by Noël de Tilly will restrain my argument that in the case of multimedia installations, a work’s identity is constantly being re-created, and this recreation has its foundation in the archive. The formation of a discourse on the basis of the archive and the archive as a resource from which artworks (re-)emerge and return to as proposed in this thesis is thus a novelty with regard to the implication for a conservator’s new role both as guardian and instigator of archival content.

## How to Get There: Methods and Means

For many years now, a split between conservation, art history and cultural studies has been conspicuous. Concerned with the object, the former mastered itself in shaping artworks’ material occurrence largely divorced from their iconological and philosophical background, whereas the latter discussed the meaning of objects largely ignoring the study of materials,

58 Ijsbrand Hummelen, “Rethinking Education in Contemporary Art Conservation,” transcript of his presentation on the occasion of the International Symposium *Contemporary Art: Who Cares?*, Royal Tropical Institute Amsterdam, June 9 – 11, 2010, accessed June 26, 2010, [www.incca.org/files/pdf/cawc/day\\_2\\_rethinking\\_education\\_session\\_summary.pdf](http://www.incca.org/files/pdf/cawc/day_2_rethinking_education_session_summary.pdf).

59 Noël de Tilly, “*Scripting Artworks*.”

60 *Ibid.*, 18.

61 Laurenson, “Authenticity, Change and Loss.”

their changeability and its possible implications. This thesis aims at giving a deeper meaning to objects drawn from changeable material and its possible cultural implications.

In responding to the current status of knowledge and its 'objects,' conservation must turn towards epistemologies and methods beyond its disciplinary boundaries. In order to understand conservation in the broader sense of a techno-cultural practice, the method(s) used in the development of this thesis reflect the current urge for a different, more eclectic engagement of conservation studies. This engagement involves the contention with conservation's past as a discipline, but also with transdisciplinarity (hard sciences, material to art/media histories and cultural studies) and innovative ways of creative thinking about cultural heritage.

In the following, I employ a mixed methodology of empirical and archival research and participant knowledge merging the observational approach, engagement with archival records (including facts based on someone else's knowledge) and my own hands-on conservation, museum and collection management experience working with a variety of media. At the core of the conception of this thesis lies my two-decades-long practical involvement in the conservation of contemporary multimedia artworks and the empirical and embodied knowledge drawn from the many participative conservation practices in the private and public domain.

Although claiming a certain uniformity, conservation practices are in fact dependent on economy, politics and the cultural context, and differ from one institution to another and from one caretaker to another at the national and international level. My practical experience as a conservator with a variety of stakeholders in public and private museums and private collectors predominantly in Germany and Switzerland (but also in other parts of Europe and in the form of commissions from the United States), has given me an overview of tendencies and approaches to changeable artworks.<sup>62</sup> Despite this multitude of contexts, the methodology lying at its foundation draws largely from the experience I acquired during my employment as a conservator (and later head of department) at the ZKM. The management of media and contemporary art collections, temporary exhibitions and private collections in ZKM's custody provided a major part of the empirical formation for this project. The specialised knowledge and understanding of media technologies involved in film, video and computer-based installations have shaped this thesis as have the internal knowledge of museum and archive functionalities and metamechanisms governing museum and archival systems. The

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62 For example, I experienced museums of modern art with an emphasis on traditional artworks in their collection (for instance, Ludwig Museum Cologne, Museum Folkwang Essen) as having different preservation policies and priorities regarding multimedia art compared with institutions devoted only to collecting and maintaining media artworks (such as ZKM). Emerging museums showed less experience in maintenance of the collections than those with a long-term presentation and conservation tradition. Rather than being restrictive in the 'usage' of objects, I experienced private collectors and private museums as emphasising practical matters in distributing their artworks (for instance Collection Falckenberg Hamburg, Collection Goetz Munich).

direct involvement with artists and the cooperative development of methods of good practice for the preservation and display of heterogeneous artefacts and the considerations that lie beyond these processes contributed considerably to this thesis.

The second methodological layer derives from archival investigations conducted at numerous locations worldwide, including Amsterdam, Bremen, Düsseldorf, Los Angeles, Paris, New York, Tokyo and Seoul. Here, from the conservator actively involved in making decisions, and participating in and overseeing their implementation, my role shifted to one of a participant observer. Rather than shaping the archive of artworks directly, I was immediately dependent on the knowledge of others, the availability of archival information and the attitudes of institutions and people involved. That is to say that this method not only relies on facts recorded in an archival file, but reflects the lack of records, and, at times, its prohibition. But my involvement was by no means inactive – rather, it shifted from active contribution through the practices of reinstallation of artworks towards the active usage of both the record of the archive with the system behind it and the potentiality of the discourse it offered. The moment of stepping back and studying the museum and archival practices of ‘the others’ and the withdrawal from first-degree involvement had a major impact on my thinking about the role of the archive in the discipline of conservation finding its resolution in the final section of this research.

In the conception of my argument in this thesis, the empirical knowledge and facts collected on the basis of the archival research have been paralleled with an in-depth theoretical study of the nature of multimedia artefacts. Although the questions pertaining to the identity of artworks emerged on the basis of everyday conservation practice, the answers necessitated a deeper theoretical engagement rather than only a practical one. For this reason, I venture into critical theory (media theory and contemporary art theory), the so-called continental philosophy, (also analytical) aesthetics, and media and art history in order to accomplish this intellectual task. In searching for the artworks’ identity, I have examined the case examples from the multitude of perspectives that these theories offer. I have used cultural theory to understand time in artworks in and beyond conservation, and social geography to understand the space associated with them. The conceptual framework in the analysis of the provenance of Paik’s oeuvre, its connection to music and its involvement with time has been developed on the basis of the tendencies prevalent in the 1950s to the 1970s and leaned on the socio-political background of these decades.

The thesis introduces seventeen case examples of Paik’s artworks. Two of the three large conceptual sections are preceded with an in-depth analysis of the most relevant artwork or artworks that frame them. As the thesis develops, my argument is enforced by using further examples that emphasise similarities and parallels between the artworks. Addressing the implication of changeability and developing the critique based on time, the examples are reintroduced from the point of view of aspects that only became possible to discuss with

the increasing level of engagement with the argument. Indeed, this method is employed throughout the entire thesis. A distinctiveness of the last section of the thesis is emphasised by the selection of a quasi-historical study, which draws on philosophy and involves artworks as a supportive medium in exemplifying the theoretical layers of these sections.

## **Approaching the Identity of Artworks**

In this thesis, three large conceptual frameworks – *Concept and Materiality*, *Time and Changeability* and *Archive and Identity* reflect my increasing intellectual involvement with the analysis of the ‘object of conservation’ – the multimedia works of art.

As a general overview of the thesis, the first part is concerned with a basic analysis of what is at stake when observing the trajectories of two of Paik’s most differing – *Arche Noah* and *TV Garden* – using a linear narrative. The second part takes on the aspect of the changeability of artworks under the consideration of the many variants extrinsic and intrinsic to the works; it introduces three encounters with *Zen for Film*, and conducts a critical contestation with the notion of time that underpins conservation and its ‘objects.’ The final stage of my argument and the third part of the thesis, which I open by discussing the philosophical fable of the Ship of Theseus, resolves the question of the identity of changeable artworks and is a plea for the necessary engagement of conservation with the archive as the site where this identity is produced. The development of my argument is underpinned by the introduction of further multimedia artworks that supplement and expand upon the main examples.

To introduce the structure of the thesis more precisely, it sets off with the investigation of the relation between the concept and material embodiment of installations. It does so while analysing the ‘object of conservation’ at its most basic level and by looking at what lies on the table when engaging with it in museum collections. The parallel introduction of Paik’s two manifestly similar multimedia installations *Arche Noah* and *TV Garden* aims at demonstrating that the unveiling of their deeper ontological levels may provide crucial distinctions in the way their identity is perceived. Upon further analysis the dualism of their dependence on material and immaterial strata is paralleled by the divergence in their trajectories – as Paik’s most widely known and presented piece, *TV Garden*, and a work known only by a few due to its almost life-long concealment in a vault – *Arche Noah*. The two opening studies are aimed at a most lucid indication of major problems in the reinstallation, presentation and conservation related to a larger portion of multimedia artworks in collections. In addition, I discuss further installations such as *Moon is the Oldest TV*, *TV Clock*, *Zen for TV* and *Canopus* in order to intensify my argument and emphasise particular aspects such as the diversity of materialisations of multimedia artworks, their dependence on instruction and their socially invested materialisation. The status of these works as open to changeability inevitably leads to questions regarding the type of change that affects them. Following the urge to not only

examine the change through empirical engagement and observation, in *Time and Changeability* the argument is taken to a further analytical level related to the time at which and in which the change occurs. The introduction of this section describing three personal encounters with *Zen for Film* intends to exemplify the multitude of forms of changeable installations and aims at directing the readers' attention to multimedia artworks as forms essentially engaged with time. The double meaning of *Zen for Film* lies both in illustrating time processed by the media but also introducing time as a concept in which the change occurs. The study of *Zen for Film* is enhanced by the analysis focused on a respective category of changeability in *Moon is the Oldest TV*, *Zen for TV*, *Magnet TV*, *TV Clock*, *Random Access*, *Record Schaschlick*, *Participation TV*, *Rembrandt Automatic and TV Garden* and *TV Buddha*. Scrutinising change as a temporal phenomenon from the perspective of a conservator directs attention to the understanding of time in conservation and leads to its subsequent critique. Based on the recognition of different than sequential, homogenous time concepts responding to the heterotemporal nature of multimedia works, in this section the thesis proposes a view of conservation as a temporal intervention. The technological ruins of *Something Pacific* exemplify how the understanding of time in media may shift from dynamic to static, similarly to artworks engaged with time more passively. It also transfers the argument to its final stage in *Archive and Identity*, resolving the problem of the identity of artworks through the concept of the archive. The fable of the Ship of Theseus deliberately provides a philosophical orientation that serves as a stylistic and methodological means to mark the type of engagement necessary to understand the subject of this study. This is enhanced by the introduction of two artworks – *Untitled (Piano) / Piano Piece* and *Hommage aan Stanley Brouwn* – that allow me to investigate the case in which an artwork becomes an archive of its own self. The philosophical orientation of the last part of the thesis serves to explain various theories of identity related to the respective examples and the enunciation of the prerequisite of conservation to engage with questions beyond its objects' physicalities that are indispensable to establish itself in a broader art-philosophical, historical and critical discourse.