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

Hölling, H.B.

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Chapter 1.

TWO WORKS BY NAM JUNE PAIK

1.1 *Arche Noah*

Arche Noah was created in 1989 and the work has had a long history. Initially, it was conceived for a gallery exhibition; shortly thereafter, it was purchased and included in the media art collection of the ZKM in Karlsruhe, Germany. Exhibited only twice and both times in different forms, it lay dormant in the museum depository for around sixteen years. Only recently has it been rediscovered and reinstalled in a form that varies slightly from the previous two. A scarcely documented piece that a few decades ago might have been considered simply uncollectible is, nowadays, one of the many examples of changeable contemporary artworks that may be encountered in museum exhibitions (Fig. 1.1).

The creation of *Arche Noah* relates to the 800th anniversary of the harbour of Hamburg. *Die Zeit*, one of Germany's leading newspapers, mentions *Arche Noah* in the following: 'And on the occasion of the 800th anniversary of the harbour of Hamburg, Paik designed *Arche Noah*, which had already been stranded on its mountain. The water of Hamburg's Alster canal you see on the TV sets does not even moisten the keel. The load of papier-mâché animals, cultural witness of video recordings and images from Hamburg's harbour is securely preserved from the flood. An idea similar to those taken from a carnival tradition, a cute gesture tinged with apt associations.'⁶⁶

Arche Noah is composed of a wooden vessel, a large-scale element constructed from the outside, true to the principles of boatbuilding, and determining the entire appearance of the installation. The vessel (about 3.5m long and 1.5m wide) is positioned on a base that confers on it an elevated, extraordinary setting. The hull is made of slats that overlap one another slightly, which were initially stained dark-brown and, at a later stage, decorated with painted symbols of a ship. Owing to the fact that the stern has an open, unfinished structure,

66 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations by the author. 'Und zum achthundertjährigen Hafengeburtstag entwarf Nam June Paik eine Arche Noah, die schon auf ihrem Berg gelandet ist. Hamburger Alsterkanalwasser auf Fernsehschirmen netzt nicht einmal mehr den Kiel. Sicher ist die Last aus buntem Pappmache-Getier, Video-Kulturzeugnissen und Bildern aus dem Hamburger Hafen über den Fluten geborgen. Eine Idee wie aus einem Karnevalsanzug, eine hübsche Geste voll sinniger Anspielungen.' Elke von Radziewsky, "Kunst ist Lebensstil: Thomas Wegners 'Weißes Haus,'" *Die Zeit* 23, February 6, 1989, accessed December 26, 2012, www.zeit.de/1989/23/kunst-ist-lebensstil.

the installation is not thought to be freestanding but, rather, affixed to the gallery wall. The base is decorated with black and white large-scale panoramic photographs that enclose the base of the boat and depict Mount Ararat, the place where *Arche Noah* is believed to have been stranded. Initially, the photographs were exposed to spectators; later, when the plants were introduced, they were partially hidden behind them.

In the late 1980s, and at the time of the creation of *Arche Noah*, the artist was interested in the interaction between technology, nature and humans. In the book *Video Art: An Anthology* (1976) Paik comments: 'Video art imitates nature, not in its appearance or mass, but in its intimate "time-structure"'.⁶⁷ *Arche Noah* relates to the archaic and biblical themes, the principle of four elements as the basis of the world, the interest in which the artist expressed in the *Passage* (created in 1989 on the same occasion), the series of *Planets*. From another perspective, the installation may also emphasise the role of technology in the salvation of humanity facing the moment of the Apocalypse. Paik explains: 'Why now Arche Noah? ... Treibhauseffekt is clear and they will force us to think about the first sintflut'⁶⁸ From a different perspective, Peter Weibel, the Chairman of ZKM noted in the catalogue *Nam June Paik: Werke aus der Sammlung des ZKM* (2008) that *Arche Noah* depicts 'the first storage of information, the first hard-drive of human beings – a kind of the first database ever.'⁶⁹ The message of Paik's 'metaphysics of media' was to influence and amend our world by its profound comprehension.⁷⁰ Yet the idea of salvation may gain another, reciprocal meaning: technology-based media, due to their progressive obsolescence and the enormous difficulty of their conservation and preservation are predisposed to vanish rapidly.

On the technical side, 28 TV sets of two different types of Panasonic colour ray tube monitors (CRT) are placed at the base of the boat and on the deck, forming a two-storey tower.⁷¹ The TV sets situated face-up at the bottom of the installation surround the base of the vessel. At a later stage, various exotic plants were arranged around the base, partially mantling the TV sets. An additional tower-like arrangement of TV sets was placed on the deck. An integral part of the installation was composed of colourfully painted papier-mâché animals depicting two flamingos, two iguanas, a dog, a giraffe, a pig and a snake. Originally, the deck

67 Nam June Paik, "Input-Time and Output-Time," in *Video Art: An Anthology*, eds. Beryl Korot and Ira Schneider (New York: The Raindance Foundation, 1976), 98.

68 Original spelling. 'Treibhauseffekt' = greenhouse effect; 'sintflut' (Sintflut) = The Flood. Heinrich Klotz, "Nam June Paik," in *Moving Image. Images en Movement – Electronic Art*, eds. Heinrich Klotz (ZKM Karlsruhe; München-Stuttgart: Oktagon Verlag, 1992), 106.

69 Peter Weibel, "Nam June Paik *Arche Noah*, 1989," in Johannes Brümmer at al. *Nam June Paik: Werke aus der Sammlung des ZKM* (Karlsruhe: EnBW Energie Baden-Württemberg AG and ZKM Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie, 2008), 21.

70 Peter Weibel, "Nam June Paik: Der Metaphysiker der Medien," in Johannes Brümmer at al. *Nam June Paik: Werke aus der Sammlung des ZKM* (Karlsruhe: EnBW Energie Baden-Württemberg AG and ZKM Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie, 2008), 9.

71 The number of monitors viewable on the documentation photographs varies. The set of monitors implemented in 2009 consisted of ten Philips 21GR9750/02B and eighteen Philips 70KD2726/42R.

was decorated with a coloured banner that can be seen only in the first photograph of the installation. As the later documentation photographs show, despite the Weisses Haus show in 1989, this particular ensemble has never been installed again.

Arche Noah was created as a three-channel video work. The video was operated using a laser disc, as was the case with many of Paik's artworks at the time. Due to the latest migration of the hardware to newer technology, the playback runs on three flash card players. Six modified video routers are built in. The visual information is repeated at regular time intervals and the images appear in pairs transversely. As in almost all Paik's installations, the video's pictorial content, reveals the rather playful character of random video assemblages composed of various fragments of moving images. The visual attraction lies in their varying graphical forms and compositional artfulness. As with many of Paik's video works, the installation lacks any audible element.

Up until 2009, any documentation of the installation was rather scarce and there are only a few records of *Arche Noah*'s exhibitions in the museum's archives. This is owing to the fact that at the early stages of ZKM's existence (the centre was founded in 1989), there was neither a conservation department nor an established archival structure. On a broader scale, the beginning of institutional collections of time-based media installations faced various difficulties related, among others, to poor infrastructure and a lack of documentation of artworks not only in Europe, but also on the American continent.⁷²

To reconstruct the entire lifespan of *Arche Noah* is therefore a meticulous process that can only succeed by putting together the diverse pieces of the puzzle. In doing so I will pay special attention to the adaptation of the object by the museum after its long period in storage, its re-discovery and, furthermore, the conceptualisation of its future existence as an exhibition object. I have divided the trajectory of *Arche Noah* into two sections: its life *before* and *after* its 're-discovery' in 2006. The early period of *Arche Noah*'s existence is characterised by its first displays, its acquisition and transformations in the course of an ongoing process of creation or, as seen from a different angle, due to the artist's changing intentions. The latter is the time of the detachment of *Arche Noah* from the effects of his intention when the first inventory was being completed. Coincidentally with the artist's death in 2006, *Arche Noah* is recovered from the museum depot and begins its 'afterlife.' Two years later, it receives the status of an exhibitible artefact with all its consequences – its adaptation to institutional constraints and its modification.

72 Maria Troy, "Video Preservation: A Report From the Trenches," *Afterimage* 23 (1996), accessed February 17, 2010.
www.experimentaltvcenter.org/video-preservation-report-trenches.

Arche Noah's Manifold Life Before

Arche Noah was assembled by Paik's assistant and fabricator in Germany, Jochen Saueracker, on the occasion of the opening of Weisses Haus in Hamburg, Germany in 1989 (Fig. 1.2). The photographs of this venue (on which I largely base my analysis) and the oral accounts of Paik's curator in Bremen and Cologne Wulf Herzogenrath, the owner of the gallery Thomas Wegner and Saueracker reveal how *Arche Noah* began its unsettled but otherwise interesting life.⁷³ It was Herzogenrath who introduced to Wegner the idea of exhibiting Paik. Weisses Haus was the first exhibition space designed for video, sound and light installation in Germany. Fulfilling a dream of any connoisseur of new media, the gallery was equipped with its own U-matic players and floor sockets to plug in video hardware.⁷⁴

The Weisses Haus photograph shows the installation with the arrangement of TV sets that remained virtually unchanged throughout the object's lifespan, including the tower-like composition on the deck and a free arrangement of monitors placed face-up at the bottom.⁷⁵ On the upper monitors a two-channel video was created following the manner of shortcuts of images representing themes related to the archaic and modern civilisations. Interestingly, the photographs taken on the occasion of the Weisses Haus exhibition depict the monitors with a blue, presumably static image. There are two possible reasons for this: technically, one possibility presumes that one channel of the installation was not receiving video information at the moment the photograph was taken.⁷⁶ According to Herzogenrath, however, the Weisses Haus video showed – in a close-circuit mode – the river *Alsterlauf* next to the gallery. Herzogenrath: '*Arche* literally drifted on the water played on the lower monitors. If someone was canoeing on the canal one could have seen him on the monitors. Closed circuit was a rarely used technology at that time.'⁷⁷ Wegner maintains that this was originally his idea and that in his archive he still possesses the camera responsible for the

73 Wulf Herzogenrath (former director of the Kunsthalle Bremen), in discussion with the author, March 2010; Thomas Wegner (Head of Weisses Haus in Hamburg), in discussion with the author, December 2012; Jochen Saueracker (Paik's former collaborator), in discussion with the author, June and August 2010.

74 'Deutschlands erster Ausstellungsraum für Video-, Klang und Lichtkunst, ein Traum für Technikfreaks, ausgerüstet mit 21 U-Matic-Recordern, mit 17 Videobodenausgängen und professioneller Tonausstattung. Billig sind die elektronischen Künste nicht gerade zu haben.' (Germany's first exhibition venue for video, sound and light art, a dream for technology lovers, equipped with 21 U-matic recorders, seventeen video signal sockets and professional audio equipment. These all seem to be not entirely inexpensive') von Radziewsky, Elke, "Kunst ist Lebensstil." <http://www.zeit.de/1989/23/Kunst-ist-Lebensstil?page=1> accessed December 13, 2009.

75 Weisses Haus issued not only an invitation with separate photographs in the form of panoramic postcards, but a playful kaleidoscope – 'Plastiskop' – in the form of a mini TV set, where the viewer was able to see every image of the presented installations by looking through a mini viewfinder and turning a knob. Archive of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam; Erik Andersch Collection, Archive of the Nam June Paik Art Center in Seoul.

76 Unlike the newer generation of LCD and plasma televisions that remain black, a CRT monitor shows a monochrome blue image while receiving no image information.

77 Herzogenrath, discussion.

live rendition of the river. This explicit site-specific character that would have been lost during consequent reinstallations, reflected the relationship that *Arche Noah* had not only with its closest neighbourhood, but also with Hamburg as a harbour. Colourful papier-mâché animals together with brightly coloured banners decorated the boat humorously. According to Herzogenrath, their ordinary, almost naïve character embodies Paik's typical gesture to contrast the seriousness of the 'hard' technology. Shrill, fancy colours and the hoisted banner lend the installation a vivid and a joyful character. Christoph Grau, then art teacher, produced the animals with ninth-year pupils (ca. fourteen years old) at the local school in order to finance the class's study trip to Italy. The improvised character of the afterhours workshop during which the animals were created explains the fact that some are not paired.⁷⁸ It is also striking that at Weisses Haus the boat was not yet painted but stained a dark-brown colour.

Heinrich Klotz, the founding director of ZKM, acquired the installation for the collection shortly thereafter. In 1991, it was presented at *MultiMediale 2* at the Opel Factory in Karlsruhe (Fig. 1.3).⁷⁹ The image of this venue shows *Arche Noah* in a confined gallery space; besides the fact that the banners seemed to have vanished, another change appeared on the vessel. Magnification of the image uncovers painted inscriptions and numerous paint drippings on the floor and on the TV sets. It is therefore likely that the paint originated in Karlsruhe and that the actual painting took place on location just moments before – or even during – the work's exhibition. It is also perhaps the only record of the direct involvement of the artist with the installation. It is unclear whether the video showing the river had been maintained. The paintings depict small-scale pictograms of ships and fish, the artist's signature and the title of the work with some corrections. The inscriptions are in Chinese and Korean; the 白南準 signifies Paik, Nam June, 노아 – Noah, 方舟 – squared ship and 함 battle ship.⁸⁰ There is an obvious analogy to Paik's other works, reminding us of *Canopus* and *Passage* (1986) from the ZKM collection. The colour is a mixture of green, red, yellow and white paint, most probably acrylic, on the wooden planking of *Arche Noah*, whereas *Passage*, for instance, is decorated with silver calligraphy and *Canopus* with black.⁸¹ Compared with the Weisses Haus installation image, at first glance one may notice that the animals are positioned

78 The animals were made of a chicken wire, wheat paste and waste paper, and painted in acrylics. Grau recalls that he personally proposed to create the animals with the class when he heard about Paik's project. Although Paik approved the ensemble, Grau remembers his disappointment that the work of his pupils was not acknowledged by the artist during the opening. Christoph Grau, in discussion with the author, December 2012.

79 *MultiMediale 2* Karlsruhe took place in form of a festival 28 May – 2 June, 1991, and in the form of an exhibition 28 May – 7 July, 1991 at the Opel factory in Karlsruhe.

80 Translation by Yunjun Lee.

81 The information is based on a macroscopic, comparative examination of the paint layer of Paik's various works and my archival research conducted at Paik's factory in Cincinnati. Furthermore, my discussions with Mark Patsfall revealed that Paik preferred a prefabricated, acrylic-based tube paint, which he often used unmixed 'directly from the tube.' Mark Patsfall (Paik's former collaborator), in discussion with the author, April 2011.

slightly differently. This becomes evident while focusing on the pair of flamingos that have been shifted to the rear of the vessel. The snakes were moved to the right and the pig appeared on the left side of the deck.

According to the records of the ZKM, the installation was loaned to the Spanish Fundació Joan Miró in Barcelona in June 1992 as part of the show *Electronic Art* (1 July – 2 September 1992). Unfortunately, nothing documenting this venue was retrievable.⁸² Saueracker recounts that at this stage Paik decided to rethink the spatial setting and modify the mode of interaction between the exhibition space and the artwork. As a result, a large number of local plants were placed near the base. The resemblance of this gesture to what happened with the electronic garden of the earlier *TV Garden*, which I will discuss shortly, is striking.⁸³ The viewers could, just as in the Düsseldorf version of *TV Garden*, observe the installation from an elevated level.

Arche Noah 's Afterlife

In October 2006, when I joined the conservation department of the ZKM, I immediately became involved in an extensive project of moving the external depot of ZKM to its new location.⁸⁴ It was then that I encountered *Arche Noah* for the first time, assessing, documenting and recording its diverse elements for the newly created conservation file. The work was in a rather poor condition – the animals had deteriorated and were unstable and dusty. Having no instruction or inventory at hand, it was impossible to ascertain that the architectural elements – the structure of the work and the painted slats – comprise the complete inventory of the work. The playback equipment was present in the form of a database entry, and was being stored in another depot and, as I later learned, occasionally used in other installations of the collection. We were groping around in the dark. After a thorough documentation, we decided to perform a cleaning treatment and bridge any tears and fissures in any materials that were endangering their stability. Some of the animals, due to their very fragile structure, were given a supporting construction, making it possible to relocate them without risking any damage. At the time, neither a re-installation nor an extensive investigation was rendered feasible; therefore the plan was to store the work until the moment when time and available

82 Despite efforts undertaken to reconstruct this 'Spanish manifestation' of *Arche Noah*, the prospects of retrieving the photographs documenting it are not optimistic. According to Saueracker the number of plants by far exceeded the dimensions of the 2009 ZKM/EnBW ensemble. Jochen Saueracker (Paik's former collaborator), in discussion with the author, June and August 2010.

83 Saueracker, discussion.

84 *Hockhalle* gave way to a depot with a much larger capacity, higher storage standards and a higher level of security. On the occasion of the relocation, much of the media installations were recorded, catalogued, repacked and assessed. The project was time-consuming, involving over ten specialists for a period of two months. My participation in this project not only allowed me to gain a profound insight into the recovery of a number of pivotal media works of early history of institutional collecting, but also largely inspired this thesis.

personnel would make it possible to schedule a re-installation. Consequently, in 2006, the artwork continued to exist in its disassembled, deactivated form.

The reinstallation took place two years later, in 2008, nearly sixteen years after its last presentation and two years after the relocation of the depot. With the prospect of an upcoming exhibition in the premises of Energie Baden-Württemberg (EnBW) Karlsruhe, a test installation was undertaken in order to accomplish the inventory and to document the object in a built-up shape. In my role as a conservator in charge, together with a team of assistants, I was actively involved in completing the documentation of the installation and monitoring its proper assembly.⁸⁵ Significant for further development of *Arche Noah* was the fact that Saueracker was consulted on re-constructing the structure from the original parts. Sketches and photographs were taken and the electronic equipment was controlled and operated. Due to the fragility of the laser disc player originally used and reflecting ZKM's preservation policy, a decision to digitalise the video data was made. Digitisation in the form of a migration from the original laser disc to the digital carrier – a flashcard player – was conducted at the Laboratory of Antique Video Systems of ZKM. The lower monitors show a different video than the closed circuit rendition from *Arche Noah's* Weisses Haus version, a compilation that must have occurred during the course of the reinstallation at the Spanish *Foundation*. In the photographs taken during the re-installation, and later published in the exhibition catalogue, both the animals and plants are missing (Fig. 1.4).⁸⁶

On the occasion of the exhibition *Nam June Paik: Werke aus der Sammlung des ZKM* (*Artworks from the ZKM Collection*, 23 October 2008 – 18 January 2009), *Arche Noah* was displayed for the first time since 1992 after its long storage interval (Fig. 1.5).⁸⁷ As the images reveal, more than forty different kinds of plants decorate the base of the vessel.⁸⁸ Observing the flashing images between the green plants – a performance of *Arche Noah* after its assemblage – I could not help but have the impression of watching a fragment of an electronic jungle known from *TV Garden*. It is also remarkable in this respect that the Karlsruhe version of Paik's *Arche Noah* comprised only exotic office plants. Because neither an instruction nor documentation of the artwork existed, the plant ensemble must have been recreated on the basis of photographs of *TV Garden*. The choice and the dimension of the arrangement with the striking presence of white flowerpots was made freely and executed by the team handling the artworks in consultation with Saueracker. Due to a curatorial decision legitimised by an

85 Other conservators involved included Antoaneta Ferres and Doreen Jäger.

86 The photographs were published in the exhibition catalogue: Brümmer at al. *Nam June Paik*, 23-25.

87 The exhibition took place at the Foyer of the EnBW building in the Durlacher Allee 93, Karlsruhe.

88 The number of plants according to the list from the archive of the ZKM art-handling department.

unsatisfactory condition and lack of financial resources to conduct the conservation prior to the show, the papier-mâché animals were missing.⁸⁹

Here, for the first time, the impossibility of keeping *Arche Noah* in its constructed form became manifest. The dimensions of the vessel not only did not allow the installation to be moved even within the museum interior but also rendered potential prospective loans outside the museum impossible. Yet the crucial factor for the decision to re-build the structure was the prevention of irreversible damage that would have occurred as a consequence of fixing the slats every time anew (Fig. 1.6).⁹⁰ Saueracker, in cooperation with the conservation department and the technical staff of the museum, performed the modifications in June 2009. The inner construction of *Arche Noah* was replaced with a new one conceived to enable dismantling of the vessel without having to take apart its planking (Fig. 1.7). As a consequence, the vessel consists of an entirely new interior that allows the main part to be taken apart into two singular elements and a base. All the wooden elements are transportable. The original construction is stored and may serve as a record of how *Arche Noah* was constructed before it was modified. Meanwhile, a specialist in paper conservation restored four large-scale photographs of Mount Ararat that are wrapped around the base of *Arche Noah*. The question of whether a replacement of photographs would be considered a long-term preservation solution for the poor shape of the original arose soon after the conservation measures. The proximity of plants that contain organic dye and humidity (and which have to be watered) was the main reason for the suggestion, just as much as the desire to avoid further tears and damage. In the course of the discussions, the idea of storing the original photograph while displaying a replica gradually developed.⁹¹ Since June 2009, *Arche Noah* has been stored at the ZKM depot. It is in store for future displays in its old but somewhat modified shape.

When observing *Arche Noah*'s past materialisations it occurs to me that aside from the painted vessel all other elements can be either replaced, replicated, migrated or emulated. Certainly the animals remain another 'stable' sculptural element once conserved. Therefore *Arche Noah* lives its life somewhere on the threshold of a physical and a conceptual entity, dictated by conservation policies, the ephemeral status of technological components and the cyclical character of the plant ensemble.

Considering the decisions that were made and the final results of both the migration of the playback equipment and the modification of the structure, it could be maintained that what actually happened to *Arche Noah* in 2008–2009 was its musealisation. Musealisation,

89 As a conservator in charge, I was involved in planning conservation treatment that had been rejected due to financial constraints prior to the exhibition and was still in question when I completed the research for this chapter in 2011.

90 A restoration of planking elements had to be already undertaken due to the ruptures that resulted from repeated mounting of the slats to the structure.

91 In a later conversation with one of the ZKM's art technician in August 2010, I learned that all photographs have since been duplicated at the ZKM's laboratory.

following the concept of the Czech museologist Zbynek Stránský, is a process of transformation of the object from its primary context to the museological context.⁹² In relation to *Arche Noah* and the problem of relics discussed further in this thesis, musealisation denotes an adaptation of a work of art to the demands and policies of the institution harbouring it; it is a domestication of sorts.⁹³ This links us again to the term of the afterlife that I have chosen to use according to the German philosopher, sociologist and musicologist Theodor Adorno who assumes that works being musealised are deprived of their initial vitality.⁹⁴ And although for Adorno, art is being revived in the museum context, when one follows the aesthetics of the American philosopher John Dewey, relegating art to the museum comes with separating it from the experiences of everyday life.⁹⁵ Art historian Deborah Cherry offers a different perspective on the afterlife; Cherry shifts the meaning of afterlife to the ‘promise of survival, of living-on, through change.’⁹⁶ For *Arche Noah* this process commenced with its 2008–2009 adaptation to satisfy museum requirements. Paradoxically the very process of display that triggers the damage of the artwork (repeated fixation of the planks) had an impact on the modification of its structure to satisfy the museum’s obligation to display artworks. The prerequisite for this process was the necessity for the work to be built up, presented and thus perceived by the viewer. Earlier, *Arche Noah* was just an installation like many other stored artefacts, lurking in a silent place of a museum depot and awaiting rediscovery. As in many other cases of installation art, its afterlife brought with it a simultaneous modification, adaptation and change.

Very intriguing in the story of *Arche Noah* and its musealisation is the way in which it problematises the role of the museum in safeguarding ephemeral and evolving artworks. Can

92 Stránský also introduces the term of museality, which refers to the meanings attributed to objects as a consequence of their musealisation, thus defining museology as a study of musealisation and museality. Peter van Mensch, “Museology and Management: Enemies or Friends? Current Tendencies in Theoretical Museology and Museum Management in Europe,” in *Museum Management in the 21st Century*, ed. E. Mizushima (Tokyo: Museum Management Academy, 2004), 3-19.

93 The art historian Anne Wagner uses the term domestication in relation to Moore’s sculptures (seminar on the occasion of *The Material Life of Things Project*, The Courtauld Institute of Art, London, 18 March 2011). In Martha Rosler’s essay *Video: Shedding the utopian moment* I encountered the term ‘museumization’ in relation to video being domesticated into installation as painting, sculpture or still life. Installation, according to Rosler, may only live in museum. Martha Rosler, “Video: Shedding the Utopian Moment (1985–86),” in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists’ Writings* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press: 1996), 472.

94 Adorno discusses the museum in terms of life and death of artworks. Theodor Adorno, Valéry Proust Museum: In Memory of Hermann von Grab,” *Prisms* (London: Prisms, 1967), 179. See also section 8.2. For a further critique of museums, see Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum’s Ruins* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1993). For a critical voice oriented against Crimp’s and Adorno’s critique, see: Ivan Gaskell, “On the Museum’s Ruins by Douglas Crimp; The Cultures of Collecting by John Elsner; Roger Cardinal; Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles by Daniel J. Sherman; Irit Rogoff,” *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 77, No. 4 (December 1995): 673-675.

95 John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Penguin Group, 2005(1934)).

96 She does so discussing the afterlives of monuments. Deborah Cherry, “The Afterlives of Monuments,” *South Asian Studies* Vol. 29, Nr. 1 (2013): 1-14.

the withdrawal of endangered artworks from its display safeguard the legacy, or is the legacy rather safeguarded by allowing the artworks' lives to continue? Do institutional custodians run the risk of incarcerating dynamic artworks by trying to force them into static structures, creating a mausoleum rather than adapting a new concept of the museum? Furthermore, a question arises pertaining to the role of conservation in the institutional domain and the position it takes. Are we as conservators obliged to follow the institutional structures or ethical rules of the profession? And what if, precisely at this moment, the rules and the approach to these types of works still need to be created? I will strive to answer these and similar questions in the development of this thesis.

The relation between *Arche Noah* and *TV Garden* is interesting not only from the point of view of its succession but also regarding how Paik balances the material and conceptual aspects of the technological and organic elements in relation to each other. In *Arche Noah*, one may encounter the loosely implemented idea of a sculptural arrangement of physical objects on the one hand, and, on the other, an entirely ephemeral composition comprising extremely fugitive – but in an obviously different way – materials, namely organic plants and TV sets, freed from any rigid prescription for the form of its materialisation.

1.2 *TV Garden*

TV Garden came into being in 1974 as alternately *TV Sea* or *Garden* with twenty monitors presenting thirty minutes of a breath-taking rush of split and synthesised images of the earlier video *Global Groove* by Paik and John Godfrey (1973, Fig. 1.8).⁹⁷ It was Paik's last show at the gallery owned by Fernanda Bonino, Paik's first dealer in America. In addition to his artistic qualities, Bonino's interest in Paik resulted from her wish to generate some publicity for the newly opened uptown gallery space in New York.⁹⁸ As she recalls, Paik's works did not sell during the entire decade, but with the lively young talent the gallery was brought the attention it needed, helped by the presence of the German artist and partner of Stockhausen, Mary Bauermeister (who Paik knew from Cologne) and Paik's downtown avant-garde friends – Allan Kaprow, John Cage, Merce Cunningham and Allen Ginsberg.⁹⁹ Art historian and Paik researcher Edith Decker-Phillips maintains that the first version of *TV Garden* lacked plants due to economic reasons – Paik could not afford to purchase so many exotic plants at the

97 Grace Glueck regards *TV Sea* as a form of presentation of the video *Global Groove*, which Paik had newly developed. Grace Glueck, "About Nanda Bonino," in *Eine Database*, ed. Klaus Bussman and Florian Matzner, (Ostfildern-Ruit: Edition Cantz, 1993), 53. John Godfrey, an American engineer, helped Paik to edit the video material in the TV Lab of the WNET New York Public Media. He has been acknowledged as a co-author of this work. John Godfrey, in discussion with the author, February 2013. See Appendix.

98 Glueck, "About Nanda Bonino," 53.

99 According to Nanda Bonino, the market for Paik's works was almost non-existent. Ibid.

time.¹⁰⁰ *TV Garden* was shown again, among other cities in Syracuse and Philadelphia, before perhaps its most significant presentation during documenta 6 in Kassel, Germany in 1977. It was Paik's first large-scale installation employing some thirty monitors lying on the floor, face-up, amongst a dense ensemble of tropical plants (Fig. 1.9).¹⁰¹ Herzogenrath maintains that in comparison with the rather reduced version shown by Bonino, the documenta 6 (and first European) materialisation of Paik's concept that fully unfold its spatial qualities, being accessible from all sides.¹⁰² Paik also installed it himself.

The *TV Garden* embraces generic monitors playing *Global Groove* in a pulsing rhythm of its changing images. The sound of *Global Groove* – music, acoustic effects and voices, which Paik liked to be played rather loudly – constitutes a dominant element of the work.¹⁰³ A dark gallery space is a prerequisite to perceive the ensemble. Resisting Paik's promise, the symbiosis of technology and nature appears here less harmonic; the organic exuberance seems to contain the installation, to supersede the artificial shining of the screens. Now and again, ironically, when their own electronic light permits it, the geometric, sculptural presence of cubical television sets interrupts the entropic greenness. There is, seemingly, an organic dominance in the space generated by the plants, at least at first glance, providing the viewer with a sensory encounter.¹⁰⁴ Yet after a while, the organic character appears to be taken over by the constant pulsing flow of the electronic image, being related both to the aesthetic, visual experience of the installation as well as to the experience of its *time*. The time diverges here; it has a different quality in the compilation of these two elements. It is organic time and media time that one encounters in *TV Garden*, and – organic media time, simultaneously. The organic duration of plants accords with the biological processes of growth and decay – a photosynthetic lifecycle – with neither a certain expiry date, nor a guarantee of longevity. The video footage presents us with a mixture of flow and artificially edited time, compressed to a certain span of recorded images, displayed with the accuracy of the controlled sequentiality and scheduled point of death and rebirth, stop and restart. The fusion of the organicity of natural time and the technological time of progress might deem Paik's garden a naturalisation

100 Edith Decker-Phillips, *Paik Video* (Barrytown, New York: Station Hill Press, 1997), 95-96.

101 Wulf Herzogenrath, "What is the Original in Video Art," in *Wie haltbar ist Videokunst? How Durable is Video Art?*, eds. Bärbel Otterbeck and Christian Scheidemann (Wolfsburg: Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, 1995), 27-37.

102 Herzogenrath claims that in contrast to Paik's other videos in which the pace and change of visual content was prevalent, *TV Garden's* video should involve the viewer and allow him/her to view the content for a while. This is also one of the reasons Paik wished to build up a barrier on which a viewer could lean. Herzogenrath, discussion.

103 *Preserving the Immaterial*, transcript of the conference held at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, on 31 March, 2001, accessed December 10, 2011, http://variablemedia.net/e/preserving/html/var_pre_session_one.html.

104 For an analysis of installations invoking sensory perceptions, see Deborah Cherry, "A Sea of Senses," in *Right About Now: Art and Theory Since the 1990s*, eds. Margriet Schavemaker and Mischa Rakier (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2007), 16-25.

of technology, a representation of an ideological ‘second nature.’¹⁰⁵ This technological and organic assemblage relates to the flow towards an unexpected end, when the media become obsolete and replaceable, and repeat their cycles in continuous recurrence of their representations.

The core element of *TV Garden* – the video *Global Groove* – starts with the following announcement: ‘This is a glimpse of a video landscape of tomorrow, when you will be able to switch on any TV station on the earth and TV guides will be as fat as the Manhattan telephone book.’ Paik’s introductory statement stands for the tape’s compositional principle and message – global channel surfing – which in 1973 constituted a visionary precursor of subsequent developments. The web platform *Media Art Net* describes *TV Garden* as follows: ‘The furiously edited “Global Groove” video playing on the screens of the TV sets flickers and flashes through the mesh of green. Ambiguous like most of Paik’s works, this one leaves open the question of whether we are dealing with a symbiosis of nature and technology, or whether the new media are leading us back into the jungle with their disordered mass of rampant images.’ Taking into account the technological developments of the past fifty years, this video presents us with a fascinating picture of this decade. We are, as the media theorist Wolfgang Ernst puts it in his media-archaeological exercise, ‘dealing with the past as a form of delayed presence, preserved in a technological memory.’¹⁰⁶ The key feature of this extraordinarily playful work is, according to Herzogenrath, the perspective from which the audience experiences it: the viewer is located on the elevated ramp and may observe the garden ‘from above’ (Fig. 1.10).¹⁰⁷

From the perspective of their on and off status, it is interesting to consider the ‘stand-by condition’ of this ensemble in relation to other installations transmitting moving images or light. So taking, for instance, a single channel video of any artist – once unplugged, it reverts into the technical body of its playback device; it could be any video, by anyone: once it is unplugged, its continuity is disrupted. This also happens to the haunting beauty of Flavin’s fluorescent bulbs that vanish from the space, reducing the work to a static structure of its plain mechanics. Aesthetically, just like *TV Garden*’s video content, it ceases to exist, transferred to a bare lifeless apparatus of which Flavin was well aware emphasising the ‘ironic humour of temporal monuments.’¹⁰⁸ Once unplugged, the temporal monument of *TV Garden* insinuates its living status in a peculiar presence of its plants, resisting extinction by the interruption of electric current. Its persistent continuum rests somewhere between the sculptural presence

105 The term implemented by the Hungarian philosopher Georg Lukács. Steven Vogel, *Against Nature: The Concept of Nature in Critical Theory* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), 13-31. See also Paik’s comparison of video and nature mentioned in the context of *Arche Noah*.

106 Wolfgang Ernst, “Media Archaeology: Method and Machine versus History and Narrative of Media,” in *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications*, eds. Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), 250.

107 Herzogenrath, discussion.

108 Greg Allen, “The Dark Side of Success,” *New York Times*, January 5, 2005.

of its monitors – sunken in darkness – and the undisturbed greenness of its plants with their discernable, delicate scent discreetly disseminated through the room. The sound is shut down, yet the life continues.

In their changeability, installations often lack boundaries. Ever since its exhibition at the documenta 6 in 1977, *TV Garden* has become a popular instance of the visionary implementation of electronic media merged with plants in the playful symbiosis of a techno-ecological garden, and has travelled to various exhibitions around the globe. In the course of its continuous re-installations, the number of monitors has increased to 120 and the number of green plants to 600. The Whitney Museum version of *TV Garden* from 1982 (with 28 TV sets and around 100 plants), curated by John Hanhardt, shows the TV sets embedded amidst plants in an amorphous yet balanced way (Fig. 1.11). The viewer observed the installation from an elevated L-shaped platform. Just one year later, in 1983, the Belgian version curated by Laurent Busin was created following only a rough sketch by Paik. Responding to the limited space of the gallery, Busin designed a self-enclosed form resembling a four-step pyramid, from which the uppermost platform visitors were able to view the ensemble. Although it was originally conceived as a one-channel video installation, in Wellington, New Zealand (*The World Over: Art in the Age of Globalization*, City Gallery, 1996), Paik authorised a second video channel.¹⁰⁹

Taking into account the different versions in which it occurred, the question arises of how *TV Garden* could become divorced from any certain kind of materialisation. Evidence might be traced back to 1996 when Paik instructed Brazilian curators to install *TV Garden*, *TV Fish* (1975) and *TV Buddha* (1974) while working with him from a distance.¹¹⁰ They were encouraged, according to Stephen Vitiello, to ‘get their own plants, their own fish, their own Brazilian Buddha.’¹¹¹ Despite the number of TVs indicated as ‘not less than thirty’ in variable sizes, Paik urged Vitiello who tried to pin him down on how to construct the *Garden*, to use his judgement.¹¹² This may also designate a group of Paik’s installations recreated from an instruction as artworks reassembling the ways in which a number of conceptual artworks

109 Nam June Paik’s *TV Garden* was a case study within the project *Variable Media Network* (VMN), accessed October 10, 2009, <http://www.variablemedia.net/e/welcome.html>. According to the VMN transcript and the Guggenheim conservation documentation, if the installation has over 40 monitors, it can be supplemented with another channel with the video *Oriental Paintings*. In New Zealand, *TV Garden* was presented on sharp orange mulch and decorated with plants different than the Euro-American type of ‘office’ plants. Archive of the conservation department, Guggenheim Museum, New York.

110 The often interchangeably used titles *Video Fish* and *TV Fish* may cause confusion. Whereas *Video Fish* (1975) consists of a variable number of monitors with aquariums, live fish and TV sets playing video, *TV Fish* (2004), such as shown at the James Coleman Gallery in 2009, involves only two fish tanks/monitor elements. In the following, Vitiello, for instance, refers to *TV Fish* having in mind the multiple monitor installation *Video Fish* (1975). *Preserving the Immaterial*.

111 *Preserving the Immaterial*.

112 ‘... When I started trying to pin him down on how to construct these pieces, his favourite thing is, “Use your judgment.” Ibid.

became materialised. In this manner, *Moon is the Oldest TV* (1965) and *Video Fish* have been loaned to Paik's Düsseldorf and Liverpool's retrospective.¹¹³

The museological life of *TV Garden* commenced in 2000 when it entered the Guggenheim Museum Collection in New York. This acquisition was preceded by its Guggenheim exhibition on the occasion of *The Worlds of Nam June Paik* (11 February – 26 April 2000, Fig. 1.12). The photographs reveal a very distinct arrangement: the elevated ramp for the viewer is no longer present and the installation lacks the earlier defined space of a rectangular gallery.¹¹⁴ Adapted for the constraints of the Frank Lloyd Wright building, the Guggenheim re-installation raised a debate as to the degree to which the work can be modified and whether the given characteristics of the gallery space may legitimise such modification.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, Paik allows for an addition of a second video channel – most probably a video entitled *Oriental Paintings*, which I was unable to retrace during my research.¹¹⁶ In light of the discussion related to its previous arrangement in the open space of the rotunda, it is intriguing that on the occasion a subsequent display of *TV Garden (Moving Pictures)* (28 June 2002 – 12 January 2003) that took place in an enclosed space of the Guggenheim Museum, New York a couple of years later, both the viewers and the museum staff expressed dissatisfaction with this version (Fig. 1.13).¹¹⁷ In 2004, *TV Garden* entered the collection of the K21 (Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Ständehaus) in Düsseldorf, 'Paik's adoptive home.'¹¹⁸ The comprehensive conservation documentation reveals the types of monitors, plants and maintenance procedures.¹¹⁹ Set in a rectangular, dark room and accessible only from the front from a platform, the installation was constructed entirely by Saueracker and approved by Paik. Due to the enormous difficulty of maintaining the living plants on a permanent display, chief conservator Werner Müller removed the traditional pots and replaced them with hydroponic plants (Fig. 1.14).¹²⁰ A plant-care company was hired to maintain them.

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- 113 Susanne Rennert (curator of Paik's retrospective at the Kunstpalast in Düsseldorf), in discussion with the author, August 2010.
- 114 The conservation file reveals that, prior to the installation, an idea of a scrim or curtain was considered to enclose the space and protect it from the dispersed light of the rotunda. Archive of the conservation department, Guggenheim Museum, New York.
- 115 For a discussion on the different types of execution of the installation see *Preserving the Immaterial*.
- 116 Caitlin Jones and Paul Kuranko (former employees of the Guggenheim Museum, New York), in discussion with the author, December 2010. Apparently neither *Oriental Paintings* nor the *Global Groove* is part of the collection of the Guggenheim Museum. In order to play the video, the museum has to request it from the EAI. Conservation documentation, archive of the conservation department, Guggenheim Museum.
- 117 This manifestation of *TV Garden* was arranged in a space protected by a scrim, and the audio was too low. Carol Stringari (Head of Conservation, Guggenheim Museum, New York), in discussion with the author, December 2010; Jones and Kuranko, discussion.
- 118 Archive of the conservation department, K21, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen in Düsseldorf.
- 119 Ibid.
- 120 Werner Müller (former head of conservation K21, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen in Düsseldorf), in discussion with the author, October 2010.

On the occasion of Paik's larger retrospective at Tate Liverpool, *TV Garden* was shown for the first time in Great Britain (17 December 2010 – 13 March 2011, Fig. 1.15).¹²¹ Interestingly, although the installation was borrowed from K21 in Düsseldorf, the physical shipment from Germany consisted solely of an instruction and a digital carrier of the video *Global Groove*. Jon Huffman, Paik's technician and curator of the estate, supervised the installation that comprised newly acquired elements from local suppliers.¹²² Even more striking, however, is the fact that after the exhibition was finished, the playback and display equipment acquired by Tate Liverpool from a local supplier was shipped to the Nam June Paik estate in the United States and stored there for future re-installation.¹²³

Following the Guggenheim and the Düsseldorf acquisitions, the Nam June Paik Art Center in Yongin, Seoul, Korea, installed its own version of *TV Garden*. The installation was created by the former artistic director of the Center Young Cheol Lee in cooperation with the landscape architect Sang Su Ahn, and Japanese video artist advisor Keigo Yamamoto (in an advisory role) on the occasion of *Now Jump*, an opening festival of the Center in October 2008.¹²⁴ This ensemble comprises the TVs and plants in an enclosed, light space (Fig. 1.16). The viewer may walk around on a path elevated slightly from the level of the garden and observe the *Garden* from all angles. When walking up the stairs of the adjacent balcony, the view on the installation enfolds at the feet of the observer in a rather impressive manner. The plants in Seoul's *TV Garden* are different than those used in other locations. Not only are they planted in the soil (a sort of a 'real' *Garden*), but the selected plants are also partially large dimensional, virtually reaching the ceiling of the gallery. A set of UV lights is responsible for the care of the green plants at night; however, according to the archivist Sang Ae Park, if the plants were to die they would need to be replaced with new ones of the same type.¹²⁵ Remarkably, the set of monitors includes not only the sculpturally relevant casing of CRTs but also a number of new flat screen TVs. The installation has been authorised in the form of a certificate.¹²⁶

It is difficult to determine how many instances and physical realisations of *TV Garden* have been realised and this account is certainly not exhaustive. There are three permanently

121 According to the wall caption, the installation comprised 60 monitors and 260 plants.

122 The assistant curator at Tate Liverpool, Eleanor Clayton: 'He gave us a shopping list of all the things we would need, including three people to help him install the work over five days ... he specified the type of plants and we basically started Googling to research the best place to get them from.' Laura Davis, "Creating Nam June Paik's TV Garden and Video Fish at Tate Liverpool" *Liverpool Daily Post*, January 27, 2011, accessed September 29, 2012, <http://www.liverpooldailypost.co.uk/liverpool-culture/liverpool-arts/2011/01/27/creating-nam-june-paik-s-tv-garden-and-video-fish-at-tate-liverpool-92534-28063197/>.

123 Eleanor Clayton, in discussion with the author, March 2010.

124 Online Database, Nam June Paik Art Center, accessed January 10, 2013, <http://www.njpartcenter.kr/en/research/collections/show.asp?id=12&pos=6&page=1>.

125 Sang Ae Park (archivist at the Nam June Paik Art Center), in discussion with the author, October 2012.

126 Archive of Nam June Paik Art Center.

registered installations in collections that exist at least to a certain degree in a physical form. (In Düsseldorf and Seoul, *TV Garden* is on permanent display). However, beyond these physical concretisations, various embodiments in the form of even simultaneously existing exhibition copies appear. What the story of *TV Garden* illustrates is the constant appearance and disappearance of a work of art which is being re-executed from instructions, even if unspecific – and adapted to the changing character of a gallery space and technical circumstances. *TV Garden* seems to reveal a process of systematic testing of the conditions for an artwork to still maintain its identity despite obvious material changes. In the system of ever occurring re-enactments of its various materialisations, the ‘becoming’ of the installation seems to create a chain of processes of its assemblage and dismantling, spatial remediation and technical modification. The endless cycle of the repetitions of its interpretations are physically punctuated by institutional acquisitions and loans from those collections in the form of a documentation of sorts, producing a posteriori knowledge about its condition and shape. *TV Garden* seems to materialise every time anew, moving its previous and the subsequent materialisation to the *archival space* of historic and also future possibilities in a manner of repeated displacements, without them having any rigid reference. As I show in part III *Archive and Identity*, in questions concerning the identity of *TV Garden* it is the archive that anticipates its versions. The work is drawn from the archive and, simultaneously, adds to it by way of a recursive contribution to the archival knowledge. The conservation of *TV Garden* is henceforth no longer the return to a past ‘original state’ but the creation of the archive that will anticipate future iterations.

To conclude, *TV Garden* becomes a non-object and object, it exists in a dematerialised form and is being re-made in perpetual reoccurrence of its iterations. What, then, makes this particular work of art a *TV Garden*-work of art? This is a question that must be answered if one wishes to consider the installation as still being that of the same work despite its changes.