

Hanna B. Hölling

## Transcending obsolescence in technological ruins? Questions of conservation and presentation in Nam June Paik's Something Pacific and Rembrandt Automatic

2013

<https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/15101>

Veröffentlichungsversion / published version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Hölling, Hanna B.: Transcending obsolescence in technological ruins? Questions of conservation and presentation in Nam June Paik's Something Pacific and Rembrandt Automatic. In: *NECSUS. European Journal of Media Studies*, Jg. 2 (2013), Nr. 2, S. 465–482. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/15101>.

### Erstmalig hier erschienen / Initial publication here:

<https://doi.org/10.5117/NECSUS2013.2.HOLL>

### Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer Creative Commons - Namensnennung - Nicht kommerziell - Keine Bearbeitungen 4.0 Lizenz zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu dieser Lizenz finden Sie hier:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>

### Terms of use:

This document is made available under a creative commons - Attribution - Non Commercial - No Derivatives 4.0 License. For more information see:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>

## Transcending obsolescence in technological ruins?

*Questions of conservation and presentation in Nam June Paik's Something Pacific and Rembrandt Automatic*

Hanna B. Hölling

NECSUS 2 (2):465–482

DOI: 10.5117/NECSUS2013.2.HOLL

### Abstract

Standing amidst the lively garden of the campus of the University of California, San Diego, I am looking at the many television sets, Buddhas, and elements of various electronic devices scattered around. As the first outdoor ensemble of the Korean video artist Nam June Paik (1932-2006), the installation *Something Pacific* (1986) was installed here almost three decades ago. Although meticulously trimmed, the grass grows over the sculptures just slightly – nature, as time, is taking over the arrangement. There is a particular feeling that is attached to this observation, a feeling of tranquillity, stasis, deactivation, perhaps meditation and somewhat religious emotion. This strangely-arranged ensemble, rather than putting malfunction on display, takes the viewer to the other side (perhaps to nostalgia), questioning the standard of what is expected of media – a desire or even demand to view a transmitted image. It is astonishing in its devotion to stillness and contemplation.

**Keywords:** conservation, Nam June Paik, ruins, technology, television, video, waste

### Introduction

Standing amidst the lively garden of the campus of the University of California, San Diego, I am looking at the many television sets, Buddhas, and elements of various electronic devices scattered around. As the first outdoor ensemble of the Korean video artist Nam June Paik (1932-2006), the installation *Something Pacific* (1986) was installed here almost three decades ago. Although meticulously trimmed, the grass grows over the sculptures just slightly – nature, as time, is taking over the arrangement.

There is a particular feeling that is attached to this observation, a feeling of tranquillity, stasis, deactivation, perhaps meditation and somewhat religious emotion. This strangely-arranged ensemble, rather than putting malfunction on display, takes the viewer to the other side (perhaps to nostalgia), questioning the standard of what is expected of media – a desire or even demand to view a transmitted image. It is astonishing in its devotion to stillness and contemplation.



Fig. 1: Nam June Paik, *Something Pacific* (1986). Stuart Collection, University of California, San Diego. Installation view on the campus, May 2011. Photograph: Hanna Hölling.

In this article, I propose to argue that in the studies of contemporary art that entail aspects of conservation, restoration, preservation, and curation of multimedia installations, Paik's media incite us to think in unfamiliar ways about the aspects of time and obsolescence, particularly explicated while contemplating technological ruins. I aim to demonstrate that in order to engage with multimedia installations one must understand their nature and behaviour; this includes the way in which they put their functionality and stasis on display, as entities inherently incorporating and processing time. The discussion is centred on one of Paik's most evocative ensembles, *Something Pacific* (1986), which thematises decay and finitude – a march towards an irreversible, entropic end, but which, to the same extent, transcends its own obsolescence. This article also introduces another of Paik's works, *Rembrandt Automatic* (*Rembrandt TV*, 1963), which, ontologically proximate to the former, is a result of his creative handling of a chance

incident. Furthermore, in what follows I attempt to foreground how the dynamism of media can be transferred into the slow motion of all things that age and decay. By a closer look, these 'ruined' media inherit a thought that adheres to the scope of this article – the thought of conservation.

## **Paik's media temporalities and the misconceptions of time in conservation**

I think I understand time better than the video artists who came from painting-sculpture. ... Music is the manipulation of time. ... As painters understand abstract space, I understand abstract time.<sup>1</sup>

At any rate, one must stress that this is neither painting nor sculpture, but a 'time-art'.<sup>2</sup>

With these words Paik articulates that there can be a different understanding of time in various media and that the musicological roots of his media art impose a thorough revision of the ruling preconceptions regarding temporality. It is to say that the engagement with time is necessary not only from the perspective of film and media studies, which is *nota bene* one of the largest theoretical categories for understanding the moving image;<sup>3</sup> rather, it is the perspective of conservation (restoration-preservation) and curation (presentation) that this essay strives to approach.

To grasp time in Paik's media signifies a deep preoccupation with their specificity. For those who engage with the care and maintenance of these art forms, it is also an obligation and a prerogative to venture into, understand, and also to devise new ways of dealing with time. In other words, in order to conserve multimedia installations we have to understand their relationship to time. By this I do not mean only the historical allocation on the chronological timeline. Although it can also be true of conservation practices related to traditional media such as painting and sculpture, the questions of time in multimedia installations are imposed by the ability of artworks to manipulate time and by the heterogeneity – and thus also hetero-temporality – of their materials. The latter is introduced by the aspects of dispersal and re-assembly during practices of their installation, replacement, and re/deactivation.

Conservation has not yet embraced advanced thinking about time with regard to its own canon and principles. The relation between conservation

and time remains rather one-sided, resting on the conviction that its aim is to deal with effects that time bequeathed on the artefacts surface or structure;<sup>4</sup> or, going so far – and particularly in traditional conservation – as to try to ‘arrest’ time or even ‘reverse’ it.<sup>5</sup> This was explicated in the attempt to search for an ‘ideal’ or ‘original’ condition, which often lays distant on the chronological scale, but to the same extent also in the paradigm of reversibility and the term of *re*-storation. The latter, from an etymological point of view, already involves the notion of ‘redoing’.<sup>6</sup> I propose to overcome these implicit notions that lean on the understanding of time as its measurement by testing an alternative concept of time in conservation – the time of continuity and duration.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, like no other art form in history, media art refers to and is embedded in technological possibilities of the time in which it originates. Contrary to a painting or sculpture in which the tool and the medium, at least to a degree, may be regarded as timeless (even if culturally and historically specific within a *longue durée*), the media apparatus is always temporally referential – meaning, specific to the time in which it originated. Furthermore, seen from a current perspective, it imposes a shift in perception from now to then.

### Transcending obsolescence: *Something Pacific*

One of the most fascinating examples of how multimedia installations can transform our understanding of time and obsolescence is revealed in relation to technological ruins. In this short digression towards things deprived of their original function as a result of decay and obsolescence, I will show how different temporalities merge with one another, evoking a presence of yet another temporality, a temporality of a suppressed activity and sustained stasis – a form of disabled technological presence. This seems to be a curiosity of sorts, taking into account the fact that technology is obviously meant to perform a dynamic function, producing an image, an audio signal, and information.



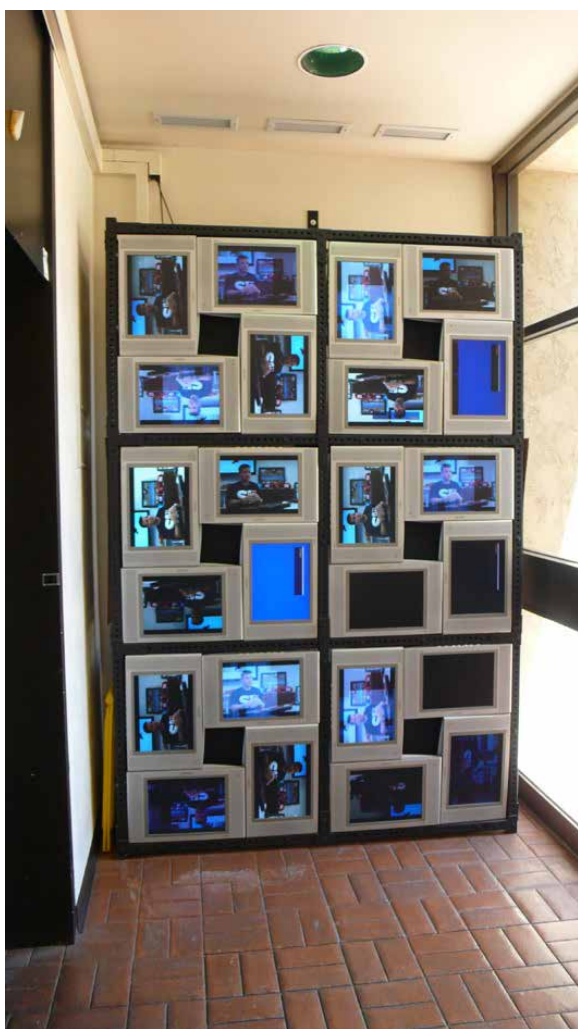


Fig. 2: Nam June Paik, *Something Pacific* (1986). Stuart Collection, University of California, San Diego. Various elements in the campus yard, May 2011. Photograph: Hanna Hölling.

*Something Pacific* (Figures 1 and 2) is Paik's first outdoor installation, conceived for the Stuart Collection, which is located at the campus of the University of California, San Diego.<sup>8</sup> The installation features a number of ensembles, including statues of Buddha and (ruined) television sets embedded in the landscape, a Watchman topped with a statue of Rodin's *Thinker*, and a *TV Graveyard* – a pile of electronic rubbish thrown out of one of the windows of the Media Center.

Indoors, Paik set up a video wall involving some 36 monitors simultaneously displaying one of Paik's videotapes and a live feed of MTV (Fig. 3). The viewer can actively manipulate a part of the monitors using a Fairlight synthesiser. The scattered ruins in the grass of the campus – skeletal remains returned to nature – were conceived to contrast the interactive installation

bound to the latest craze in broadcast television and dependent on the audience's active participation. This work raises a number of interesting questions related to its conservation and presentation. As years passed the synthesiser had to be repaired. Can we simply allow 'the grass to continue growing' over the video wall? Even if the characteristic Samsung monitors (already a later replacement approved by the artist) could be obtained on the second-hand market and piled up in storage, guaranteeing the initial look of the installation for the next decade or two, should the original live feed of MTV be displayed in the form of a recording from the 1980s? Or, should the feed reflect the rather different content of the network today?<sup>9</sup>



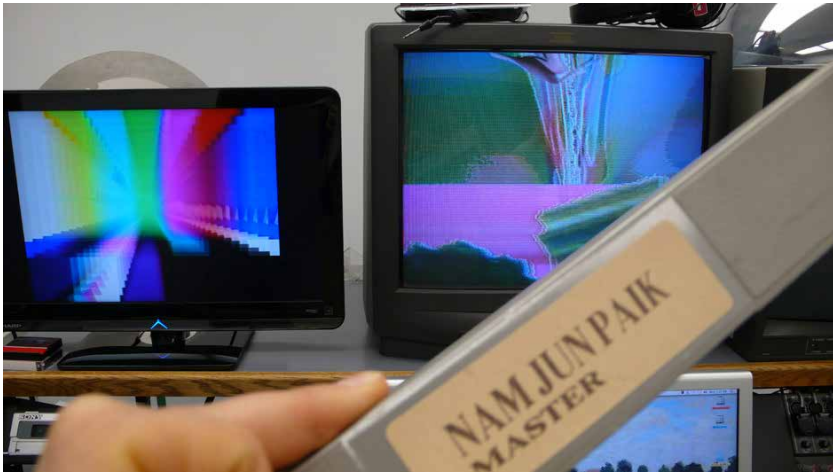


Fig. 3a, b: Nam June Paik, *Something Pacific* (1986). Stuart Collection, University of California, San Diego. The video wall and its maser tape at the UCSD Media Center.

Photograph: Hanna Hölling.

In a later interview, Paik releases us from this problem. In response to whether, in the case of a breakage, an attempt should be made to replace the Fairlight synthesiser by a similar model maintaining the state of technology of 1985-86, Paik asserts:

[n]o, I think it should be made better. Every young kid expects more now from media. So they should go with the progress of industry. ... It's like a symphony. When you write a symphony each new generation comes along and changes it and that way it becomes better and better. We got Ormandy, and Toscanini, and they all make good work. They all make the conductor's work. Curators make good work now.<sup>10</sup>

Are Paik's curators to be associated with conservators and conservators to be linked with curators? I will come back to this rather intriguing idea shortly.

When looking into the electronic rubbish immersed in and overgrown by nature, the outdoor 'symphony' of *Something Pacific* seems to have experienced just one 'enactment'. It is interesting to consider the ensemble from the point of view of its value both as an artwork and as waste. As the art historian George Kubler puts it, once an object is discarded, it becomes litter or scrap, and thus introduces a reversal of values from something



wanted to something worthless.<sup>11</sup> On Paik's technological graveyard, the value undergoes a double reversal – the equipment becomes discarded and becomes scrap; it is re-evaluated in the form of a work of art. This seems to have crucial consequences for its conservation: should the 'scrap value' prevail over the 'art value'? This discussion reminds us of Alois Riegl's classification of values ascribed to a monument as either the intended or unintended creation of humans and something lying distant in the past.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps slightly anachronistic at first sight, this association with Riegl's values, assigned for the purpose of this essay to Paik's multimedia work, confronts us with an interesting situation and allows us to understand the re-valorisation at stake.

If the age and historical value prevailed in *Something Pacific*, we would have to allow for a gradual decay of Paik's outdoor arrangement, which is somehow incorporated into its logic. If left entirely to wear and tear, would the artistic value of the installation then not be somewhat affected? If something turns into dust, it carries different connotations from the initial meaning. The only apparent openness of the installation to the *Lauf der Dinge* inevitably brings about a finitude. If the elements of the installation would be exchanged, the work would continue. The exchangeability, independent of the age of the surrogates used, would inevitably introduce a new value; it would also, logically, suppress the age and – to a degree – perhaps also the historical value of the ensemble.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, this would shift the understanding of continuity based on preservation of the material and evidential authenticity of a work of art inherent to the Western conservation tradition to the continuity of the artwork's form over time, not necessarily bound with the physical sameness and origins of materials used.<sup>14</sup>

It is important in this context to reconsider Paik's voice. His statements often allow for interpretations that suggest openness towards exchangeability and 'making things new'.<sup>15</sup> If Paik's attitude in response to technological progress and change should be decisive about upgrading the broadcast of the video wall, and to the same extent about the exchangeability of 'ruins' in the yard of the campus, the solution to our problem regarding the future shape of the artwork comes rather easily. However, if intentionality was to be understood relationally and the historic value of the ensemble was to be of greater importance, the video wall would present us with a dilemma. The process of emulation or migration of an installation's visible elements – which are recognised conservation strategies for technology-based media – would have to involve equilibrium between new and old components and consider the meaning of the initial arrangement. In re-thinking the installation in the light of the temporalities involved, I believe that the key

to an understanding of its logic lies in approaching it as both a technological ruin and a work of art in an art collection.

On the technological yard of *Something Pacific*, time is experienced in a remarkably transformed and 'prolonged' way. The device that commonly serves to actively manipulate the viewer's perception of time, transmitting signals in real time and/or in delay, giving the possibility to rewind, fast-forward, or stop the flow of audio-visual output, is disabled here.<sup>16</sup> The keyboard seems to be a lonely remnant of some kind of suggested former possibility of communication with the interface. The stasis speaks for another temporal presence; it is a conservation of dynamic time into a static one, a conservation of the technological flow of temporalities into the movement of all things that decay in a more linear way, so to speak. The technological apparatus becomes another identity, one of a more static object passively responding to time, a thing that might or might not be conserved in terms of the traditional conservation of non-technological artefacts. The problems related to the performing elements of technological devices ceased to exist; what is there is a television set or a Watchman, in their present-ness of plastic casings and glazings, buttons, grids and gitters, all so prone to weather conditions that it evokes an anxiety in any custodian or conservator involved. It is the sun, its UV rays, the rain, air pollution, groundwater and salts, insects, worms, and – not least – the people (their dogs, moods, and lawn mowers) that create a condition as distant from an optimal museum protective casket as one can possibly imagine. It seems to be a truly superb joke by the video master, this confrontation in which we inevitably lose.

However, this rather pessimistic vision unveils an undertone of hope; a peculiar preservation idea is entailed in these deactivated technological elements. In underlining their static nature Paik's work moves from functioning devices with their inherent temporal logic to their deactivation as a result of an artistic gesture. The former activeness of the devices exists only in the sphere of the viewers' unconscious or tacit knowledge – a television obviously serves to transform visual impulses – so the ensemble is necessarily associated with lacking electronic vision paired with a peculiar displacement in the yard's habitat. The latter together with the double temporal flip mastered by Paik creates a sculptural graveyard of sorts, which escaped the fate of technological obsolescence. In this context, in a beautifully-formulated essay, the art critic and historian Michael Newman asks:

[w]hat happens when the analogue technologies of memory are themselves left behind by the forward march of progress? This concerns not only the obsolete object, which may harbour an unrealised, even explosive, potential – the chance encounter for which the Surrealists hoped as they wandered the Paris flea markets. It also concerns the very technological medium of memory that is capable of transforming the modality of the past from a bygone actuality to something that has the potential to open up another future in the present. While the relation to the past considered as information is a matter of knowledge, the relation to it as trace is that of witness: it concerns us.<sup>17</sup>

Paik's ensemble escapes obsolescence; in its material form it has a different 'chance for eternity' than it would have had in its original, active incarnation. 'To have a dead TV set is as good as a live one', Paik contends. 'I have returned them [the TV sets] back to nature, placing them in a situation which makes them seem *eternal*, part of a technological ruin.'<sup>18</sup> Inevitably, an association with what the Hungarian philosopher Georg Lukács names the 'second nature' comes to mind.<sup>19</sup> What happens here is a naturalisation of technology and a fusion of the organic component of natural time, along with the (disabled here) technological time of progress. Moreover, Paik's gesture – a conservation gesture of sorts – moves the ontological status of the apparatus to the space of non-activity, and thus performs its salvage. I will return to this after the introduction of another of Paik's creations: *Rembrandt Automatic*.

### Evocative deactivation, nostalgia, and technological ruin: *Rembrandt Automatic*

*Rembrandt Automatic* (Fig. 4) emerged during Paik's first solo show, The Exposition of Music – Electronic Television (11-20 March 1963), at Rolf Jährling's gallery Parnass in Wuppertal, Germany.<sup>20</sup> As a result of Paik's creative adaptation of a given situation rather than a pre-conceived work, as was the case with *Something Pacific*, a defective television set was turned with the screen to the floor and endowed with a sculptural presence reinforced by its defect. To be sure, Paik's creative handling of the chance incident reminds us of John Cage's implementation of chance and contingency into the creative process, which, in turn, echoes Duchampian practices.<sup>21</sup> Interestingly, while some sources describe the aura of the light *Rembrandt Automatic* spread on the floor during the Parnass show, others maintain that the monitor was

dark. When experienced nowadays its dysfunction directs the attention of the viewer to the stillness of the casing, to a certain form of concealed, yet detectable, absence.



*Fig. 4: Nam June Paik, Rembrandt Automatic (1963). Installation view during the exhibition Nam June Paik: Video Artist, Performance Artist, Composer and Visionary, Tate Liverpool, 17 December 2010 – 13 March 2011. Photograph: Hanna Hölling.*

Evoking a certain curiosity, this sort of absence is different from the absence of the vision in *Something Pacific*, which is associated with the function of the television as a sort of a 'vision machine'. What do we see when we look at the static casing of *Rembrandt Automatic*? What would we see if the screen of *Rembrandt Automatic* had been turned towards us? This concealment of the eventuality of there being an image transfers perception into pure speculation, since what is there is a monumental casing, turned off and disabled in a double sense; it is disabled as a technical device in its switched-off condition and disabled as an appliance presenting us, if properly positioned, with the possibility of an image, a sort of an electronic – in Virilian terms – window.<sup>22</sup> Although to a different degree than in *Something Pacific* and its more direct confrontation with the absence of vision, *Rembrandt Automatic* becomes close to what the psychoanalyst and writer Christopher Bollas calls 'evocative object'.<sup>23</sup> Here, the evocative object is associated with a sort of nostalgia towards an (imagined) past, eliciting personal feelings and longing for what such a past could have been rather than what it was. It is also the lost past of analogue television and cathode

ray tube technology that transfers each of us who experienced childhood stories sitting in front of this cubic device to his/her own home, some place far away, more important if no longer present.

According to Bollas, 'nostalgia is the emotion of love lost, grief sustained and gratitude for the evocative power of memory that allows us to hold to the lost object'.<sup>24</sup> In those terms, if we think of the conservation of these specific (but also perhaps other) art forms, preservation acts against forgetfulness. It becomes a powerful means for its often argued engagement with such a past, thus also with grief, memory, and personal or personalised origins. Engaging with nostalgia, which was long considered as a disease and treated with medication, conservation gestures approximates curating, which originates etymologically in the Old French expression 'curation', meaning 'treatment of illness', or the Latin 'curare' – 'to cure'.<sup>25</sup> This recalls Paik's argument in the previous section. Important in this relation is that conservators are often metaphorically associated with 'doctors' in their mission to cure the (just as metaphorical) 'malaise' of the artwork.

What is equally interesting for *Rembrandt Automatic* and its initial function that now rests solely in the imagination of the viewer is that the active medium (just as its 'window function') ceased to exist; what remained is a sort of a technological ruin, a television casing that now more than in its initial, imagined functional shape manifests its pure, sculptural objecthood. Being a means without an end,<sup>26</sup> approximating formalist autonomy, it is now nothing else than an object governed by time that agrees with the decay and alteration intrinsic to all artefacts, the *time of the outside* – cosmological time that exists independent both of human perception and of technology that transforms it. In this context, would *Rembrandt*, which evokes an association with the Dutch master, mean more than just a television brand?

The ruin bears the 'traces' of time as a historical palimpsest. As the philosopher Jacques Derrida puts it:

[t]he ruin does not supervene like an accident upon a monument that was intact only yesterday. In the beginning there is a ruin. Ruin is that what happens to the image from the moment of the first gaze.<sup>27</sup>

If we follow this, ruination is a process that is intrinsic to all works of art, as they are all subject to decay and ageing. Technological ruins may bear analogy with the classical ruin, often depicted symbolically as a fleeting representation of eternity. The technological ruin seems to contain something particular, different to other media. It is perhaps the idea of what the artist Robert Smithson names a 'ruin in reverse',<sup>28</sup> it becomes a ruin before it is



assembled. Smithson emphasises Vladimir Nabokov's thesis that 'the future is but the obsolete in reverse'.<sup>29</sup> New ruins give a more brutal impression than classical ones.<sup>30</sup> In the technological ruin, the malfunction brings awareness to things – of their assemblages of technical parts and careful fitting.<sup>31</sup> The bygone glory of *Rembrandt Automatic* as an apparatus reminds us of the attempt of technology to overcome its *incompatibility with time*. No longer strained by the obligation to transmit, the defective television set sustains itself in its enclosed temporality preserving an image of a past.

### By means of conclusion: The puzzling dilemma of technological ruins

In its own sense of time, the ruin presents us with a set of intriguing questions. The concept of the technological ruin exists somewhere in the realm of a static object, but a static object that once experienced its own activity. In this sense, might time then become a *memory of the static object*? What does it mean to remake a ruin? Can a ruin be 'ruined'?

The grounds of the UC San Diego campus deliver a very interesting test for conservation as a process intervening in time. Exposed to rapid ageing and decay, and thus different from the gallery space environment of *Rembrandt Automatic*, the sculptures in the yard prompted stakeholders to retrieve equipment matching the casings of Paik's ensemble in second-hand markets.<sup>32</sup> If the television casings were to be replaced, a new trajectory would be introduced to *Something Pacific*. Its time would be 'rewound' for a number of years, until these casings also fall victim to atmospheric conditions. For the yard, time is anything but merciful. Should we succumb to the lure of decay and prevent 'lifting their timeworn remains out of their time'?<sup>33</sup> Are we as conservators enemies of ruins, or rather ruination?<sup>34</sup> Discussing the archaeological approach to ruins, the Finno-Swedish author Göran Schild adopts a radical perspective:

[f]rom ... [the] ontological [perspective] all conservation is a loss because it deprives the ruin of its essential quality: its relation to time. Can anything give us a more vivid understanding of time's exceptional dimension, and of our own place in this context than such flotsam and jetsam?<sup>35</sup>

Interestingly, one of the paradoxes of the technological ruin lies in the ambiguity of its very being; both *Rembrandt Automatic* and *Something Pacific* are examples. One could argue that the 'ruin' was never unconcerned

with technology. Unlike the idea of a ruin as having value that is linked with the 18<sup>th</sup> century ‘progressive’ conception of history, our relation to ruin rests in the fact that technological ruins are, in a way, *specific* to us, to our temporal-cultural-technological context. Also, and regarding the attraction of ruins, it could be said that, unlike classical ruins, technology seems to be too young to attract us with this decaying facet.<sup>36</sup> There is also the question of space that must be added to the temporal question that links *Something Pacific* with American Land Art,<sup>37</sup> and which also, of necessity, becomes political. The graveyards of electronic dust polluting the planet in some distant country linked with child labor, health hazards, and environmental devastation are hardly picturesque (which could be said of Paik’s ruins) – and if so, only in a most disturbing way.

The conservation of (Paik’s) ruins contradicts their nature as something about decay, degradation, and ageing. The replacement of the decaying elements that would serve the idea of their presentation in the future is, in a way, a helpless gesture against time working on the surfaces and structures of television bodies; it is also a moment in which the particularity of ruins comes to the fore most clearly. To come back to Derrida, conservation of ruins is indeed an accident that supervenes upon a monument and introduces a new trajectory, different temporality, and other processes of ‘ruination’. If the graveyard was conceived as something to awaken memories and thoughts, and to immerse the viewer in this psychedelic image of technology gradually surrendering itself to entropy, an intervention in this process is essentially misplaced. However, if an intervention in time, a replacement, allows a prolongation of the work’s experience, it is the responsibility of the conservator and curator to feel compelled to act.

## Notes

1. The Museum of Modern Art, ‘MoMA Highlights’, [http://www.moma.org/collection/browse\\_results.php?object\\_id=81152](http://www.moma.org/collection/browse_results.php?object_id=81152) (accessed 19 September 2012).
2. Original text: ‘Jedenfalls muss man betonen, dass es weder Malerei, noch Skulptur, sondern ein “Zeit-Kunst” ist’. Paik 1992, p. 54.
3. There is a rich body of scholarship devoted to the understanding of time in media, beginning from the first transmission and storage devices through photography, film, and video. Each of these ontological categories introduces a different understanding of time explicated in the writings of Bergson, Deleuze, and Bazin, to the more recent criticism of Mary Ann Doane, Laura Mulvey and Bliss Cua Lim, to name a few.
4. A vast amount of conservation literature deals with aspects of time as historical linear time, time of measurement, and intervals. For instance, restoration theorist Cesare Brandi recognises the ‘duration’ of the creative process, the ‘interval’ between it and the present, and

- the 'moment' of a work's recognition by the observer. Brandi 2005, pp. 61-64; and Francesca Valentini, 'Cesare Brandi's Theory of Restoration: Some Principles Discussed in Relation with the Conservation of Contemporary Art', <http://www.aboutrestoration.eu/text/cesare%20brandi.pdf> (accessed on 25 January 2013). For adapting Brandian theory in relation to the value attributed to time, see Pugliese & Ferriani & Rava 2008, pp. 484-488. For time and its relation to conservation, see Albano 1996, p. 183. For a remark on time in relation to its linear structure see Schintzel 2012, pp. 100-119. For time and preservation of video art, see Reck 1995, pp. 86-90.
5. For a critique of reversibility in relation to the notions of retreatability and removability, not yet advancing the conception of time, see Muñoz Viñas 2005, pp. 183-188.
  6. 'Re-' word-forming element; C. 1200; from Old French and also from Latin *re-* 'again, back, against'. *Online Etymology Dictionary*, s.v. 're-', [http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed\\_in\\_frame=0&search=re-&searchmode=nl](http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=re-&searchmode=nl) (accessed on 24 April 2013).
  7. The spatial limits of this essay do not allow me to venture into this concept. It shall suffice to mention that it leans on Henry Bergson's *durée* and allows one to conceive of the co-existence of the past in the present and the temporal equivalence of artworks' various 'conditions' or instantiations. Hölling 2013, pp. 149-170.
  8. I have explored the aspect of technological ruin in relation to this installation in Hölling 2012, pp. 185-187.
  9. This problem is reflected in the dialectic of *high* and *low intentionality* introduced by the philosopher Randall R. Dipert in the context of musical performance. Whereas using the old broadcast would comply with the low intentionality – a method that was initially used by the artist to achieve a certain effect – the new feed would reflect the artist's wish to include an element that evokes the feeling of novelty and tension in the audience. For high and low intentionality, see Dipert 1988; Dipert 1993.
  10. Paik & Simon 2001, pp. 114-115.
  11. Kubler 2008 (orig. in 1962).
  12. For a discussion on values, see Riegl 1996, pp. 69-83.
  13. If we agree with Riegl, historical value would be the value of the artwork as a historical monument (from the Renaissance linkage with art value), whereas the age value would be ascribed to monuments for aesthetic attributes related to their 'pastness'.
  14. This refers to the so-called problem of material constitution, in which the spatio-temporal continuity of things is opposed by the mereological theory of persistence of identity through change manifest, for instance in the philosophical fable of the ship of Theseus.
  15. According to Jochen Saueracker, Paik's long-term fabricator in Germany, once asked about a possible restoration of a defect device, Paik responded: 'We do not make such stupidities. We make everything new.' Saueracker, p. 197.
  16. Often in the case of musealised installations of the 1960s and 1970s that formerly performed an interactive function, this process leads to the creation of artifacts, relics, static leftovers and props. For a discussion on this see Hölling 2013, pp. 134-138.
  17. Newman 2011, pp. 102-103.
  18. Pincus 1986.
  19. Vogel 1996, pp. 13-31.
  20. As most of the artworks from the Wuppertal show, *Rembrandt Automatic* exists as a replica that was named after the make of a monitor that was available during its 1976 reconstruction.
  21. I am thinking here of Cage's chance operations based on *I Ching* and Marcel Duchamp's creative handling of the famous breakage of *Large Glass (The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even, 1915-23)*, among others.

22. Paul Virilio claims that the screen is an extension of glass invented four thousand years ago and associated with its transparency. He discerns between the French window (door), a window as a place of light and looking, and a television screen (a constructed space of telecommunication and technology). Armitage 2001, pp. 69-81.
23. Bollas 2009.
24. Ibid., p. 80.
25. *Online Etymology Dictionary*, s.v. 'curation', [http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed\\_in\\_frame=0&search=curation&searchmode=none](http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=curation&searchmode=none) (accessed 9 May 2013).
26. This formulation echoes Giorgio Agamben's *Means Without End*, which, clearly in another context, is devoted to the rethinking of politics (a politics of gesture as a politics of means without an end).
27. Derrida 2011, p. 43.
28. Robert Smithson coins the term 'ruin in reverse' in his descriptions of the specific architectural settings of New Jersey. Smithson 2011, p. 49.
29. Nabokov as quoted in Smithson 1966.
30. This was central for Albert Speer's *Theory of Ruin Value* (*Ruinentheoriwertung*, 1969), disfavoured due to its political engagement with National Socialism. Speer's idea assumed that by building the Third Reich's architecture in such a way, the ruins would be aesthetically pleasing to the viewer in thousands of years to come. See also Burström 2011, pp. 119-128.
31. Malfunction can become another perspective on things, shown by Bruno Latour's classical example of an overhead projector. Latour 1999, p. 183.
32. Mathieu Gregoire (project manager Stuart Collection), in discussion with the author, May 2011.
33. Göran Schildt, 'Ruin Memories', <http://ruinmemories.org/> (accessed on 28 August 2012), quoted in Ruin & Ers 2011, p. 121.
34. Göran Schildt ascribes this attitude to the archaeological approach that acknowledges historical values in ruins and tries to conserve them by all means, even if this includes sacrificing other material evidence from the excavation. Ibid.
35. Ibid., p. 122.
36. For a discussion of technological dust and e-waste see Parikka 2011. <http://www.living-booksaboutlife.org/books/Medianatures> (accessed on 1 January 2013).
37. Paik states the following: 'Working with the landscape, I have made a history of the television, which is also the American landscape after the World War II.' Pincus 1986.

## References

- Albano, A. 'Art in Transition' in *Historical and philosophical issues in the conservation of cultural heritage* edited by N. Price, M. Talley Jr., and A. Vaccar. Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Trust, 1996.
- Agamben, G. *Means without end: Notes on politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.
- Armitage, J (ed.). *Virilio live: Selected interviews*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2001.
- Bazin, A. 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image' in *What is cinema?* edited by H. Gray. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967.
- Bergson, H. *Creative evolution* translated by A. Mitchell. Mineola-New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1998 (orig. in 1907).
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Time and free will* translated by F. Pogson. London: Elibron Classics, 2005 (orig. in 1889).
- Bollas, N. *The evocative object world*. New York: Routledge, 2009.

- Brandi, C. *Theory of restoration* translated by C. Rockwell. Florence: Nardini Editore, 2005.
- Burström, M. 'Creative Confusion' in *Rethinking time: Essays on history, memory and representation* edited by H. Ruin and A. Er. Södertörn Högskola: Södertörn Philosophical Studies 9, 2011: 119-128.
- Cua Lim, B. *Translating time: Cinema, the fantastic, and temporal critique*. Duke University Press, 2009.
- Deleuze, G. *Bergsonism* translated by H. Tomlinson and B. Habberjam. New York: Zone Books, 1991 (orig. in 1966).
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Cinema 1: The movement image* translated by H. Tomlinson and B. Habberjam. London-New York: Continuum, 2012 (orig. in 1983).
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Cinema 2: The time-image* translated by H. Tomlinson and R. Galeta. London-New York: Continuum, 2012 (orig. in 1985).
- Derrida, J. 'The Memoirs of the Blind, 1990' in *Ruins: Documents of contemporary art* edited by B. Dillon. Cambridge-London: The MIT Press/Whitechapel Gallery, 2011.
- Dipert, R. 'Towards a Genuine Philosophy of the Performing Arts', *Reason Papers*, 13 (1988): 182-200.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Artifacts, art works, and agency*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993.
- Doane, M. *The emergence of cinematic time*. Cambridge-London: Harvard University Press, 2002.
- Hölling, H. 'Monitor's Matters' in *Simon Denny, full participation*. Aspen: Aspen Press, 2012.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Re:Paik: On time, changeability and identity in the conservation of Nam June Paik multimedia installations*. Ph.D dissertation. University of Amsterdam, 2013.
- Kubler, G. *The shape of time: Remarks on the history of things*. New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 2008 (orig. in 1962).
- Latour, B. *Pandora's hope: Essays on the reality of science studies*. Harvard: President and Fellows of Harvard College, 1999.
- Muñoz Viñas, S. *Contemporary theory of conservation*. Oxford: Elsevier, 2005.
- Mulvey, L. *Death 24x a second: Stillness and the moving image*. London: Reaktion Books, 2006.
- Newman, M. 'Analogue, Chance and Memory' in *Tacita Dean: Film* edited by N. Cullinan. London: Tate Publishing, 2011.
- Online Etymology Dictionary*, s.v. 're-' and 'curation'. [http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed\\_in\\_frame=0&search=re-&searchmode=nl](http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=re-&searchmode=nl) (accessed on 24 April 2013).
- Paik, N. and Decker, E. *Niederschriften eines Kulturnomaden: Aphorismen, Briefe, Texte*. Köln: DuMont, 1992.
- Paik, N. and Simon, J. 'Interview Nam June Paik' in *Landmarks: Sculpture commissions for the Stuart Collection at the University of California San Diego* edited by M. Beebe et al. New York: Rizzoli, 2001.
- Parikka, J. (ed.). *Medianatures: The materiality of information technology and electronic waste*. Living Books About Life, Open Humanities Press, 2011.
- Pincus, R. 'Artist "Installs" His Views of TV', *The San Diego Union*, 27 April 1986.
- Pugliese, M., Ferriani, B., and Rava, A. 'Time, Originality and Materiality in Contemporary Conservation: The Theory of Restoration by Cesare Brandi, Between Tradition and Innovation', *15th Triennial Conference New Delhi, 22 – 26 September 2008: ICOM Committee for Conservation: Preprints* edited by J. Bridgland. New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 2008.
- Reck, H. 'Authenticity in Fine Art to the Present Day' in *Wie haltbar ist Videokunst? How durable is video art?* edited by B. Otterbeck and C. Scheidermann. Wolfsburg: Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, 1995.
- Riegl, A. 'The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Essence and Development' in *Historical and philosophical issues in the conservation of cultural heritage* edited by N. Price et al. Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Trust, 1996.



- Ruin, H. and Er, A (eds). *Rethinking time: Essays on history, memory and representation*. Södertörn Högskola: Södertörn Philosophical Studies 9, 2011.
- Saueracker, J. 'Intuition und Schaltkreis: Zur Reinstallation von Paik's Videoinstallationen' in *Schweizer Videokunst der 1970er und 1980er Jahre: Eine Rekonstruktion* edited by I. Schubiger. Zürich: JRP Ringier/AktiveArchive.
- Schintzel, H. 'Info-Virus Art and Restoration: Some Reflections' in *Innovative approaches to the complex care of contemporary art* edited by I. Szmelter. London: Archetype Books, 2012.
- Smithson, R. 'Entropy and the New Monuments', *Artforum*, June 1966.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 'A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey, 1967' in *Ruin: Documents of contemporary art* edited by B. Dillon. Cambridge-London: The MIT Press/Whitechapel Gallery, 2011.
- Valentini, F. 'Cesare Brandi's Theory of Restoration: Some Principles Discussed in Relation With the Conservation of Contemporary Art'. <http://www.aboutrestoration.eu/text/cesare%20brandi.pdf> (accessed on 25 January 2013).
- Vogel, S. *Against nature: The concept of nature in critical theory*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996.

## About the author

**Hanna Hölling** is a conservator and cultural historian specialising in art and media installations with a particular emphasis on the developments of the 1960s and 70s. In her research and teaching she is interested in the aspects of time, changeability, continuity, identity, and archive in relation to how we conceive of artworks in terms of objects that endure. Hölling has lectured on the conservation of media and contemporary art, media art history, and material studies at universities and art schools in Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Glasgow, New York, and Stuttgart. She has held appointments as conservator in various museums in Europe, most recently as head of the conservation department at the ZKM Center for Art and Media in Karlsruhe, Germany. As Andrew W. Mellon Visiting Professor she teaches courses within the project Cultures of Conservation at the Bard Graduate Center in New York.



© 2013 Hölling / Amsterdam University Press.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.