

The aesthetics of change: on the relative durations of the impermanent and critical thinking in conservation¹

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ABSTRACT Can we conceive of artworks in terms of their temporal duration – as events, performances and processes? Can artworks, including the recent portion of artistic production as well as traditional artworks, be rethought in terms of time and their intrinsic temporalities? Why and how would it matter for their conservation? This paper offers an opportunity to rethink traditional paradigms of conservation and art theory that regard objects as fixed and static entities. It proposes letting go of the belief in the apparent stability of objects that for too long has offered a skewed message by isolating the negative qualities of change. The kind of thinking in the expanded field of curation and conservation presented here fosters the acknowledgement of changeability and impermanence of these media as a condition of possibility for their survival.

Introduction

You say: the real, the world as it is. But it is not, it becomes! It moves, it changes! It doesn't wait for us to change ... It is more mobile than you can imagine. You are getting closer to this reality when you say it 'presents itself'; that means that *it is not* there, existing as an object. The world, the real is not an object. It is a *process* (Cage 1981: 80).

With these words, John Cage, one of the most influential avant-garde composers, music theorists, writers and artists of the 20th century, reminds us of the change that the psychophysical world undergoes. This change opposes the fixity and self-containment of objects and artworks² – an issue frequently neglected, especially when we analyse the expanded field of conservation, including presentation and curatorial practices. Too often, these practices

assume a certain fixity of objects or even strive to accomplish it.

In this paper, I propose to revisit some implicit and explicit concepts in art and conservation theories that contributed to a notion of a static object with a particular emphasis on the materiality of Nam June Paik's filmic work *Zen for Film* (1962–64), also known as *Fluxfilm No.1*. Fluxus is a particularly fruitful terrain for my query essentially due to its precursory role in the development of performance art, its questioning of the status of the object and its focus on the idea of temporality and duration.

From traditional to new conceptions

For some considerable time, both art and conservation theories were oriented towards a static, stable, unique and authentic object. In conservation discourse and practice, such

an understanding of an object was bound with traditional approaches established in the context of the restoration of artworks conceived of as unique things, often in a single medium, embodying an (individual) authorial intention. Because the goal of traditional conservation was to render 'objects' stable, change was charged with negative qualities, so it was often to be concealed and/or arrested. This also had an impact on the notion of time implicit in thinking about the conservation of artworks. Associated with a negative aspect of change, time was smoking the picture (William Hogarth), often related to the negative effects of yellowing, cracking and fading of painted layers. Paradoxes of the ideas about time and their relation to the status of objects resulted in attempts to return the pervious, 'intended', condition of an object following – and at the same time subverting – the linear conception of time (Hölling 2013: 157). With the introduction of changeable artworks sometime from the middle of the last century, conservation theories gradually began to shift. New thinking in this field began to be marked by the dichotomy of the enduring and the ephemeral – two different conditions of art to be conceptualised and treated differently.

Until the transformation in the understanding of artworks created since the late 1950s brought about different conceptions of what art might be, art theoretical discourse, too, revolved around the questionable term of a static art object (Merewether and Potts 2010: 5; Heubach 1970). Since the late 1950s, artworks have gradually become associated with action, performance, happening and event. "Art" is an artwork not as long as it endures, but when it happens,' claimed German art theorist and psychologist Friedrich Wolfram Heubach (1970).³ The idea of duration and temporality ruptured art-historical narratives and effectuated a certain detour in the understanding of the art object, formulated in the criticism of that time, notably in relation to painting. American critic Harold Rosenberg sought to understand a painting in terms of the transformation of its artefactual 'thingness' to the act of painting itself (Rosenberg 1952). The event of the painting resulted in the physical evidence of a

completed set of actions. In his writings, following Rosenberg and with reference to Jackson Pollock, Allan Kaprow approached Pollock's paintings in terms of concluded happenings (Kaprow 2003 [1958]). A painting was 'happening' now (shifting its status from gerund to a verb) (McLure 2007: 14), and an artwork 'worked'. As one of the most versatile artistic tendencies of the 1960s, Fluxus, too, radically questioned the status of the 'art object' as both a representation and as a static entity. Art, since Fluxus, has become a do-it-yourself – but rather than a do-it-yourself object, a do-it-yourself reality. The functional, sacrosanct object, an art object as a commodity and as a vehicle of its own history, was rejected by artists associated with Fluxus (which did not prevent it from returning in the later phase of the commodification of performances).⁴ Instead, and as we shall see in the example of *Zen for Film*, art became that which happens and transitions – an artwork in the state of *permanent impermanence*.

Zen for Film

Zen for Film (Fig.1) is a filmic artwork created by the Korean-American artist Nam June Paik (1932–2006) sometime between 1962 and 1964. In its simplicity, Paik's creative act assumed a Duchampian gesture of a ready-made: what the work constituted was a blank 16 mm film leader run through a projector. Although functioning as a concept rather than a physical arrangement of things, the work, as originally conceived, was bound to a specific display apparatus, a film projector. The projector determined the behaviour of the work and resulted in a visual performance in which change – the accumulated dust, scratches and marks – played a considerable role. *Zen for Film* leans on the aesthetics of bricolage: Paik's creative gesture rendered a conventionally used film leader, a material widely available, and an ubiquitously present analogue film projector, his filmic opus magnum. The more used the better – the film, worn, used and stressed, was to represent the material condition of its

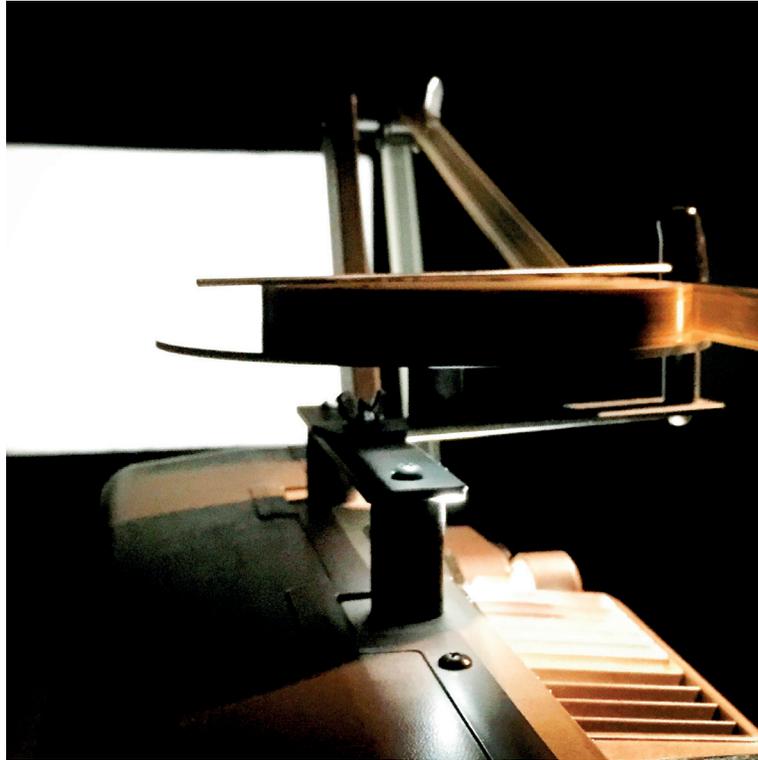


Figure 1 Nam June Paik, *Zen For Film*, 1962–64, Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York. Installation view during the exhibition *Revisions—Zen for Film*, Bard Graduate Center's Focus Gallery, New York, 17 September 2015–21 February 2016. (Photo: Hanna Hölling.)

own existence, as well as Paik's thinking *with* and *through* the medium of film in the vein of experimental and structural cinema.

Zen for Film must have fascinated George Maciunas (1931–1978), a self-proclaimed Fluxus impresario and organisational force as well as a cinephile and enthusiast of film culture. Producing unlimited homemade Fluxus editions, Fluxkits, Maciunas encased various lengths of a blank film leader in several plastic boxes acquired in Canal Street in New York.⁵ Through this gesture, *Zen for Film* from Fluxkit emerged: it indeed retained Paik's initial concept (a potentially projectable film), but it also became something else – a collectable artefact. Additionally, Maciunas also transposed *Zen for Film*'s simple logic – a leader that runs through a projector with no determination of duration – into a determined duration of a Fluxfilm

programme. One of them, *Fluxfilm Anthology* (1962–1970),⁶ comprises some 37 Fluxfilms by artists including George Brecht, Dick Higgins, Yoko Ono and Wolf Vostell. *Zen for Film* opens the compilation with a title sequence: 'Zen for Film Fluxfilm No.1. Nam June Paik.' In this film, the processual character of the artwork, its trace accumulation and the undetermined duration of projection became fixed (which did not prevent the new medium from being worn and stressed in its own manner).

The transposition of *Zen for Film* to its Fluxkit variant and to *Film Anthology* effectuated from Maciunas' ideology of economic distribution of Fluxus artworks reassured by his leftist political attitude. Art making, according to Maciunas, should be available to everybody and should use the simplest means available. From another perspective, Paik,



Figure 2 Remnant from the projections of Nam June Paik's *Zen For Film*, 1962–64, from the 1960s, Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York. Installation view during the exhibition *Revisions—Zen for Film*, Bard Graduate Center's Focus Gallery, New York, 17 September 2015–21 February 2016. (Photo: Hanna Hölling.)

too, was interested in simplicity derived from Zen Buddhism and its assignment of minimal importance to the execution of artworks as well as an emphasis on the nature of materials (an artwork is already a work of natural art before the arrival of the artist on the scene). The identity of the early *Zen for Film* might be located in its transition from Paik's initial idea (a blank film run on a projector) to Maciunas' later interpretations (*Zen for Film* as a Fluxkit and as a part of *Fluxfilm Anthology*) which not only destabilises the concept of a static object, but also questions the notion of singular authorship. Later transitions of *Zen for Film*, however, have to be entirely attributed to the artwork's museological life.

The troubling multiplicity

Zen for Film has entered numerous collections such as the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, Harvard Art Museums/the Fogg Art Museum in Cambridge and the Walker Art

Center in Minneapolis, among many others. Increasingly, the artwork has been displayed as a 16 mm projection, as a film from Fluxkit, as a film relic from the 1960s enclosed in a film can and housed by the MoMA Silverman Fluxus Collection (Fig. 2), and as a digital file.⁷ The work can also be viewed and is known to the majority of the Internet users in its digital form on YouTube, UbuWeb and through the Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI) digital database.

In the course of my research, *Zen for Film* materialised in many variants and variations. For instance, the Guggenheim Museum in New York presented *Zen for Film* as a projection together with the 1960s filmic relic (*The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860–1989*, 30 January–19 April 2009), while Tate Liverpool displayed a digital file extracted from *Fluxfilm Anthology (Nam June Paik: Video Artist, Performance Artist, Composer and Visionary*, 17 December 2010–13 March 2011). MoMA displayed *Zen for Film* as a looped 16 mm film projection⁸ (*There Will Never Be Silence: Scoring John Cage's 3'44"*, 12 October 2013–22 June 2014) and has only recently discouraged presentation of the filmic relic vis-à-vis the projection. Often the viewer encounters in the gallery only the Fluxkit version of the work, which represents the idea of a collectable but lacks the cinematic representation of Paik's idea.

There is, it seems, no limitation to the multiplicity of existence of Paik's filmic work. This is also the reason why, when it comes to the moment of its exhibition, the standard art-historical line of inquiry might not be sufficient to account for what is at stake. Although obtaining permissions (either from Paik's Estate and/or from one of the museums) seems to be a sufficient condition to project the work, how about *Zen for Film's* many physical variants, the relic of the 1960s and the filmic residues produced more recently? Are all these works, indeed, *Zen for Film*?

Is *Zen for Film* conservable? When the work is displayed as a projection, nothing changes hands between the borrower and the lender but the instruction (the borrower is responsible for an arrangement of both the projection

and the film leader). Therefore, it could be said that there is indeed nothing to be *preserved*. But if we examine more closely the idea of retaining the filmic relic from the 1960s, its preservation might signal an attachment to the physical trace – to the conservation of the tangible, stable object. Having a different history, *Zen for Film* from Fluxkits also seems to satisfy conservation's materialist ideology in that these films are never projected, but are kept encased in a plastic box.

Zen for Film is neither exhibitable nor conservable without asking more profound questions concerning its nature and behaviour. Is *Zen for Film* an object to be respected for its artefactual nature and material idiosyncrasies – an object-multiple or an object-relic? Is it an idea, a concept, or, rather, a cinematic event, a performance of the blank film (where the role of the body known from traditional performance is taken over by the apparatus), or a process of trace accumulation and degradation? How has what it is been determined by what it once was, or what it has become in the process of reinterpretation, affected by conceptual and physical change? All in all, *what, how and when is the artwork?*

Although to attempt to give answers to each of these questions in this paper would necessarily fail due to the spatial constraints, and *Revisions–Zen for Film* (Hölling 2015a) elaborates on them more extensively,⁹ in the following, I argue that *Zen for Film's* changeable character reflects the temporal turn of the 1960s and performance-oriented interests. I also propose that the dilemma posed by the multiplicity of *Zen for Film's* potential presentations reflects the dialectic of permanence and impermanence, explicated in the attachment to the physical, collectable object and in the zeal to preserve static things.

The dichotomy of the permanent and the impermanent

Thinking about artworks can never be divorced from the temporal aspects of materiality. In

this context, I cannot help but wonder what it means that something, an artwork, is *impermanent*. The ideal of permanence of things and interests in securing the existence of artworks in the future bound with the notion of timelessness is an underlying principle of conservation. But what is the reason for this? Why do objects have to be rendered permanent? Where does the division between the permanent and impermanent come from, and how can we conceive of artworks in relation to this dichotomy?

I hypothesise that this dichotomy is evoked by the problem of the understanding of artworks as being *in time, in duration*, and has something to do with the understanding of time in terms of endurance as cut to the human dimension. Likewise, this problem might also relate to the fact that in conservation and museum practice, the life of a conservator or a curator is too short to grasp the temporal passing of a masterpiece, which is therefore conceived – and has to be conserved – to endure forever, or at least for an 'ever' of a human temporal dimension. This is precisely, I would argue, what elicits the idea of a stable, 'conservable' object and what determines traditional theories of conservation.

The consideration of the temporal aspect of artworks evokes Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's division between spatial and temporal art and its critique in media and art theories (Lessing 1853). As I argued in *Re:Paik* (Hölling 2013: 188–90), spatial art has similar qualities to temporal art, and might be viewed as *slow* rather than *fast*. Such a temporal definition of a medium allows us to identify its *active* and *passive* response to time, and differentiation in the ways media undergo change. Artworks such as media installations, performance and events actively involved with time experience faster change; slower artworks such as painting and sculpture passively respond to time, which becomes reflected in the degradation, decay and ageing of their physical materials. In its cinematic manifestation, *Zen for Film's* constant readiness to shed its physical freight renders it an artwork actively responding to time. On the artefactual level, the Fluxkits and relic, in turn, accept the temporal passing,

clearly visible in the embrittlement of the celluloid, yellowing of the labels and plastic casings.

With this and the example of *Zen for Film* in mind, rather than thinking about the permanent versus the impermanent, I suggest reconsidering artworks from the point of view of the *relativity of their temporal duration*.

The relative durations of the impermanent

‘The issue is not one of the ephemeral versus the permanent. Nothing is forever. It is the question of the relative durations of the impermanent’, stated British performance artist Stuart Brisley (2008: 83). Accordingly, perhaps instead of the problematic dichotomy of the permanent and impermanent, one could focus attention on the aesthetics and qualities of change, accepting change as a *positive value* with regard to both short-durational and long-durational works.

In order to elucidate my point, I will argue that because *Zen for Film* can be re-instantiated every time anew with the help of a different film projector and a leader, it approximates the cyclical, occurrent and repetitive logic of performance and event. Artworks-events, performances and processes often require textual stabilisation: scores, instructions, scripts, testimonies and digital narratives. Although there is no evidence that Paik ever formulated an instruction on how to project the film, *Zen for Film*’s instruction exists both implicitly (it is passed over by Paik’s Estate, his curators and collaborators) and explicitly in the form of a document, such as, for instance *Loan Specifications* formulated by MoMA.¹⁰

Artworks-events, performances and processes also generate a vast number of objects and by-products that act against its temporal passing – the ‘death drive’ as it were. Documentation (film, video, photography, text), props, costumes and leftovers, requisites and relics all fill in for the absence of the event, ensuring a relation to the sphere of the tangible, legible and visible. Here, the aesthetics of change might be replaced by the aesthetics

of disappearance, understood as generative of the amassment of materials produced while the work ‘disappears’. This deficiency generates the urge to preserve and collect which, in turn, expands the artworks’ all-accumulating archive. As in Freud’s theory of fetish that also relates to the affect oriented towards physical objects, this desire to collect is never stilled. In the context of performance theory, the writer and curator Christopher Bedford names this phenomenon ‘the viral ontology of performance’, and relates it to extended trace history (theoretically extendable to infinity) and reanimation of performance in a variety of media (Bedford 2012).

Documentation, too, partakes in this rationality. In the absence of the event, a complex structure of multilayered documentation proves the existence of the work. Just as for Barthes the essence of film resides in film stills (Barthes 1970),¹¹ for art theorist Sven Lütticken, the essence of true live performance might be seen in photos, films, video and descriptions (Lütticken 2005: 24). Whether or not the existence of such essence in film and performance can be claimed, focused attention paid to their extended residual history is highly relevant for the understanding of the nature of their sources. Here, the *Fluxfilm Anthology* variant of *Zen for Film* might be seen as both a residue and a documentation of the projection of the 1960s bearing evidence of its material condition at the moment it was transposed by Maciunas.¹²

In a sort of genealogical interdependence, in which facsimiles of documents build upon documents and which, in turn, build upon documents that become artworks themselves,¹³ such *stratigraphy of documentation* may never cease to expand, continually depositing new layers on the already accumulated sediment. New interpretations, technologies, cultures of actualisation (permitting certain things while restricting others), and multiple locations in which the work exists or is reinterpreted render the achievement of the totality of an artwork’s archive an illusion. The subsequent interpretation will therefore only rely on fragmented information and will be never unbiased, complete.

From the temporal perspective, then, *Zen for Film* might be conceived of as a performance of sorts, in which the action is enacted by the projector and witnessed by the audience. The mechanical embodiment consists of an apparatus that runs a blank film and results in a projected-upon vertical surface. What remains of this performance is film loops endowed with trace, a temporal marker and reference to the many hours of labour, individual objects to be appreciated for their evidential quality. Dependent on the status of the projection, and contingent on value judgements regarding what might receive permission to enter the archive (whether it is deemed valuable, historical or worthless), the residues of this performance – the used films – are ‘conservable’ and might be preserved. Potentially, they may, just like the early film and the boxed Fluxkit editions, become a signifier of times long passed – fossilised filmic artefact-relics cherished for their link to the past, but also precisely for this reason condemned never again to see the light of the projector.

Following the perpetual logic of preservation, can we keep the residues of *Zen for Film*’s current projections? Too many leftovers may possibly relativise the value of the relic that rests not only in its singularity as an element of the historical projection, but also in the commodity value that it acquires as a non-replicable, unique and fetishised collectable. During numerous conversations with curators, a suggestion to oblige borrowers to destroy used filmstrips produced in the course of the works’ reinstallations surprised me. If such suggestions have to be followed, would it not allow MoMA to claim a certain exclusivity of its relic?

Clearly, such practice would disable the potential limitlessness of *Zen for Film*’s existence implied in its concept. Rather than being final products, according to Dick Higgins’ theory of an *exemplarist* nature of artwork (Higgins 1978: 156), the objects resulting from the realisation of such a concept (but also from a notation or a model) are only *examples*.¹⁴ The practice of imposing limitations on *Zen for Film*’s open character (which not only pertains

to the openness of the initial concept but is also specific to Fluxus’ open-ended, mass-produced editions) might be understood as an intervention in the symbolic economy of artworks. This practice leans towards a consumption of commodified products and is deprived of the open, active and social process involved in contingencies and instabilities of *Zen for Film*.¹⁵

More consequences of artworks’ temporal relativity

‘Love objects, respect objects’, pleads American artist Claes Oldenburg referencing the creative act of selection and care for what is picked up after the performance (Oldenburg 1995 [1962]). He continues: ‘Residual objects are created in the course of making the performance and during repeated performances. The performance is the main thing, but when it’s over there are a number of subordinate pieces, which might be isolated, souvenirs, or residual objects.’ These residual previously ‘acted’ or ‘domesticated’ objects bear memory and a history that might unfold in the present (Brignone 2009: 67). They also, most importantly, fulfill the desire to stabilise and preserve objects in accordance with traditional (Western) museological standards. Moreover, if works were not meant to function as collectable objects, but became such – *Zen for Film*’s filmic relic being an example – the processes of commodification dictated by market economies reinforce conservation and ‘conservationist’ gestures. The process of musealisation counters disappearance. The wish to cure grief and nostalgia with the fetish of an object is, indeed, deeply rooted.

Now, the implications of thinking along the lines of artworks’ temporal relativity may have fascinating consequences. If one inverts the standard assumption of an artwork as an object, a question might be posed as to whether or not all artworks might be conceived of as temporal entities, either long or short events, performances or processes. Accordingly, traditional paintings or sculptures would become long-durational artworks. This may also invert

conventional thinking in conservation and curatorial and museum practice. Not only could the dichotomy of 'the ephemeral' versus 'the permanent' be revoked, but also the problem of grappling with the nature of the 'new' (multi-media, performance, event) through the lens of deeply rooted ideas about the old, 'stable' object.

Perhaps also, as one more consequence of my proposition, traditional artworks could be approached through the lens of the 'new'. Seen from the conservation perspective, it seems to be a novelty that requires some attention, not pursuable here. Performances or events have a compressed temporal presence, but are no less material. Moreover, the number of materials produced by the artwork might be seen as inversely proportional to its endurance in time. In other words, the 'sooner' the artwork disappears, and perhaps the more intensive it is, the more it produces. In the process of musealisation and commodification, and in response to the urge to secure tangible things, leftovers, props, relics, video and film documentation may even acquire the status of artworks themselves.¹⁶ These things, of course, might be kept 'forever,' satisfying the traditional materialist attitude.

That is not to say that long-durational artworks fail to produce documentation – quite the contrary. Notwithstanding, as seen in proportion to their duration, the documentation in long-durational works seems to be incomparable with the amassment of documentation and residual objects produced by performance. There is a lot in long-durational objects, but they are never as varied and rich in genre and quantity and in potential to become artworks as in the case of short-durational works.

But what could be analogue to the performance's relics and leftovers in the case of traditional objects? Perhaps, in a sense, the 'stable object' is its own relic and remnant, accumulating stratigraphic strata of its own making and all past interventions (cleaning, retouching, etc.). While works by acclaimed artists would hold the position of the relic, the unsigned painting bought at the Housing Works Thrift Shop for 5 dollars might be conceived of as a leftover of an unappreciated performance.

After the event, or what remains

The way of conceptualisation of *Zen for Film* as performance recalls the aesthetic theories of philosopher David Davies (2004). The type-theory stems from C.S. Peirce's semantic distinctions between the senses of the words 'type' and 'token' (Peirce 1906). Generally speaking, this much-debated distinction applies to the multiple arts such as music and photography, and characterises tokens as instantiating the universal type (prints of a photograph, performances of a musical work). Building on Gregory Currie's suspension of the distinction between the singular and multiple arts (Goodman's theory of symbols being an example of this distinction),¹⁷ Davies offers a twist on his theory by claiming that all artworks are token-events rather than type-events (Rohrbaugh 2005 [2002]). Interestingly, coinciding with the temporal turn in the arts of the 1960s and its theoretical underpinnings discussed earlier, for Davies, the real work is the process, a series of actions by which the artist arrives at his product and not the product itself. According to Davies, the painted canvas is a 'focus of appreciation' through which we appreciate the artist's achievement and which embodies the artist's idea and work. Kinds of foci determine physical objects; some require analysing the enactment (Davies 2004).

I believe that the idea of an artwork identified by the sort of creative action undertaken by an artist is very interesting. However, if approached from a reversed perspective, this theory might indeed be taken further. If careful attention is paid to the modes of artworks' creation – in other words, how they came into being – the conditions for identifications of artworks might equally be provided by the observation of the *afterlives* of artworks. An artwork's afterlife concerns the time after the work 'happened' (in Heubach's sense), important to identify what and how the artwork is. This realisation is highly important because it is the *only* reality to which we have access. So instead of retroactively identifying, not to say imagining, the past, the proposed theory insists on looking at the present: it is not exclusively the process of creation

that provides information on what these works are (which always involves guesswork), but the re-enactment, expanded trace history, actualisation and also transition – decay, disintegration and degradation. My proposition falls within the type-theoretic proposal, but unlike Currie and Davies' theory of works as performances, it focuses instead on what is left: the object, leftovers, props, residues, documentation, etc.¹⁸ Thus, although both theories concern the question of *when* the artwork is, my proposal focuses on a mode of studying artworks that shifts from how and when art was created, to *what is left* from the creative act, what became of it in the present – the only reality given and point of access to the work. Consequently, the shift from product-art (traditional artworks) to process-art (artworks after the temporal turn in the sense of both the 1960s temporal shift and the temporal theories proposed) implies the concerns with that which *remains*.¹⁹

Duration and intensity

Further it follows that artworks might be identified in relation to their temporal characteristics: they might all be understood as durational, yet distinct. Events endure differently from performances, whereby the defining parameters here are duration and intensity.²⁰ Albeit subject to relativity judgment, the duration and intensity distinguishes the event from performance, from process, from object, and overcomes the dichotomy of two categories of artworks – the permanent and the impermanent.

In fact, *Zen for Film* presents us with an entire variety of temporal durations. Although, as I stressed, the distinctions between these categories are relative: if Paik's film is conceptualised within a particular context, it might be grasped as an event (in the sense of a non-repeatable, cinematic event), performance (in the sense of the performed spectacle and dependent on the length of viewer's engagement), process (in the sense of accumulating traces throughout the totality of the time in which it is projected) and

object (in the sense of apparatus, filmic props, Fluxfilms and filmic remnant-relic).

The strategies of continuation of artworks such as *Zen for Film* reflect the way in which they are conceived. Against the historical ban on reproduction (Phelan 1993: 3), performance might be re-enacted and process redone. Despite the singularity and irreducibility of the qualities of experience of an event, there is a recognition that the event will be repeated, too, albeit differently (Heathfield 2013: 31). The system of recurring iterations always involves deferral and difference.²¹ However, the 'technique of repetition' does not apply to artworks as physical objects. Not compliant with the ruling museological and conservation culture, such re-doing of an object will always be classified as a copy, or, in more derogatory terms, a forgery, depending on valency, rules and legislation. And yet, in an ongoing aporia of existential diversity, do performance, event and process not result in 'objects-originals'? (See *Zen for Film*'s relic.)

Autochronic and allochronic works

Forgery recalls the Goodman distinctions between forgeable/autographic and unforgeable/allographic arts (Goodman 1976). Generally, it could be assumed that allographic arts are characterised by short duration and autographic works by long duration. Here, in order to stress the temporal dimension of my argument and draw attention to another of its aspects, I would like to replace allographic and autographic with the neologisms of allochronicity and autochronicity, respectively. I owe this terminology to the theorist and composer Michael Century,²² who employs it in relation to the specificity of scores.²³ Re-proposing Century's terms in the context of the temporal relativity of artworks, I propose that the allochronic might refer to artworks untethered to a specific temporality and re-performable, while the autochronic might designate artworks that have a specific, fixed relation to time. Autochronic artworks

are something hitherto designated as long-durational, quasi 'stable objects', while allochronic artworks may reoccur in instances of their repeated iterations.

Zen for Film's relic would thus assume the character of an autochronic entity, while *Zen for Film* projection, an allochronic one. Again, this distinction is only viable in the context of the Western traditional museological (and conservation culture), in which the replication of the long-durational artwork is not accepted as a valid strategy of its continuation. Staying close in its relationship to the token-theory by denying the divide between the multiple and singular artworks, autochronicity and allochronicity assure both the artwork's location in a temporal structure and its temporal identity.

Conservation as temporal intervention

In sum, the transformation in artworks created in the post-Cagean era such as *Zen for Film* reflects not only a general change in the concept of art, what art can be (a question of ontological nature) – and I have only scratched the surface of this puzzle – but also elicits a shift in thinking on their presentation and continuity. If we consider the order of things in conservation and curation seriously, apart from its theoretical implications, the suspension of the dichotomy of traditional 'enduring' objects versus 'ephemeral' short-durational objects would release us from the urge to dissolve the conflicting poles in everyday practice. Instead of arresting change, and situating conservation as an active actor in this impossible mission, we may think of artworks of all kinds as ever-changing and evolving entities that continually undergo physical alteration and transition.

Accordingly, curation and conservation might be considered a temporal intervention in these artworks. Rather than assigning it regenerative capabilities (sometimes wondrously allowing the artwork to return to its 'original state'), conservation would instigate just another change to the work in its long- or short-durational existence, compliant with archival

and cultural permissions and/or limitations. Dependent on the cultures of conservation, it is the archive that establishes the rules and sets limits on what can be said or made, both with reference to the present, as well as to the past (Hölling 2013: 217–65; 2015b).

Rather than suggesting that performance theories are the non plus ultra to continue this inquiry, they may, I believe, offer an opportunity to rethink traditional objects in terms of duration. This, in turn, might expose the hidden deficiencies of theories long applied, and once and for all allow us to let go of the belief in the apparent stability of objects that for too long offered a skewed message by isolating the negative qualities of change.

The kind of thinking in the expanded field of curation and conservation presented here fosters the acknowledgement of changeability and impermanence of these media as a condition of possibility for their survival. As Jack Gladney in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*, once said: 'I've got death inside me. It's just a question of whether or not I can outlive it' (DeLillo 2009 [1985]: 150).

Notes

1. This contribution originated as a paper presented during the symposium *Authenticity in Transition* at the Glasgow School of Art/ University of Glasgow (1–2 December 2014) and on the occasion of the 2015 College Art Association Annual Meeting in New York (11 February 2015, session *Preserving the Artistic Legacies of the 1960s and 1970s*). See also the catalogue accompanying an eponymously titled exhibition at the Bard Graduate Center Focus Gallery in New York (17 September 2015–10 January 2016) (Hölling 2015a).
2. Whereas Cage might have also had in mind the impossibility of the object to represent or embody the real (as the real is in continual becoming), my treatment of his statement relates to the problem posed by the conception of a static object – a persistent notion in art-theoretical and conservation discourse.
3. 'Kunst' ist ein Kunstwerk nicht so lange, wie es hält, sondern passiert' (my translation).

4. In turn, assigned by the American critic Michael Fried with a certain form of performativity, the object-art of minimalism becomes theatrical (Fried 1998 [1967]).
5. The number of Fluxkits produced by Maciunas probably exceeded 20.
6. Distributed by Electronic Arts Intermix (EIA), New York.
7. With these variants the possibility of the existence of *Zen for Film* is not yet exhausted. An 8 mm projection complicates its early history as a 16 mm film projection. Further, the questions of the documentary status of *Zen for Film* as a digital file (a part of *Fluxfilm Anthology*) raise an interesting debate as to the relation of the artwork to its documentation and the thin line that often separates them.
8. Early on, *Zen for Film* was a linear projection.
9. In *Revisions–Zen for Film*, I have pursued an extended analysis of *Zen for Film*'s multiple trajectories linked with the process of its distribution and musealisation.
10. Encountered by the author on the occasion of the preparations for the exhibition *Revisions–Zen for Film*.
11. *Zen for Film* would, in this case, pose an exception. Its leader presents us with no images, no filmic photographs that might bear Barthes' essence of the filmic medium.
12. A remark on EAI's website (www.eai.org/webPage.htm?id=41) speaks to the identity of *Zen for Film* from *Fluxfilm Anthology* as, in fact, a document.
13. Mike Kelly's *The Parasite Lilly* (1980) displayed on the occasion of *The Rituals of the Rented Island* (Whitney Museum of American Art, 31 October 2013–2 February 2014) might serve here as an example. Rehearsal documentation, film, photographs, facsimiles, slides on different stages of emulation and digital reproduction were only some elements of its complex stratigraphy of documentation.
14. Higgins established his theory of the examlativist nature of work in his writing entitled 'An exemplativist manifesto' (Higgins 1978: 156).
15. My argument approximates a similar debate in musicology concerning the grasp of musical work in terms of performance rather than a product-commodity (see Cook 2001). For contingencies and instabilities of the event and their relation to performance as a primary postmodern mode, see Kaye 1994.
16. Beuys, who practised 'religious conservation of his artworks' (Eric Mignon) or Paul Thek, who desperately sought support to keep the residues of his processual installations being examples. For a discussion of iconisation of Beuys' performance artefacts, see Mignon 2009.
17. Goodman 1976.
18. For an intriguing thought considering art as documentation, see Groys 2008.
19. There is one more aspect worthy of our close attention. As no artwork exists outside the context of that which remains of it, the medium (in both its material and immaterial format) might become identifiable by the change it experiences. It is the transition, deterioration, remediation, emulation and re-enactment that offer the point of access to the understanding of the nature of changeable works.
20. In this context, thinking about time in terms of intensity rather than in terms of the spatialised, mechanised way of time measurement appears more adequate.
21. According to Deleuze, if there was no difference in repetition, things would be identical: repetition is opposed to the fixity and identity of representation (Deleuze 1994 [1968]).
22. Michael Century (Professor of New Media and Music, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy), in discussion with the author, October 2013.
23. Century speaks about the open, improvisational and allochronic character of the score on a continuum as opposed to the closed, routine, autochronic score (Century 2014).

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