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On the occasion of the 45th Venice Biennale (1993), the artistic director, Achille Bonito Oliva, commissioned a television commercial with the aim of improving the institution's image in a period of low international recognition. The result consists of twenty-one short videos created by Nam June Paik, Paul Garrin and Marco Giusti. The Biennale is recalled through the use of visual fragments of tourist sites in Venice, combined with performance elements and popular images. This paper analyses the attempt to portray the Venice Biennale in an advertisement and repositions the commercials in Paik's body of work. In addition, the aim of the text is to understand Paik's self-appropriation mechanism, which resembles the functioning of memory.

Introduction

In 1993, Nam June Paik was one of the most celebrated artists at the 45th Venice Biennale, titled *Cardinal Points of Art*. Together with Hans Haacke, he received the prize for the best national pavilion, becoming an emblem of the transnational trend of the globalising world. The award was assigned to the German Pavilion¹ because the two artists representing the country, by critically questioning the notion of national identity, best captured the «transnational spirit»² of the Biennale. In addition to winning the prize, Paik was also the protagonist of the Biennale's marketing strategy and was commissioned to create a commercial to celebrate one hundred years since the first council meeting in April 1893, in which it was decided to start what would later become the Venice Biennale.

The *Hi Tech Gondola*³ videos were initially intended to be part of a larger project called *PLOT ART*. The draft programme, dated 26th October 1992⁴, notes that *PLOT ART*⁵ was to take place outside the Giardini in public spaces. Alongside the video clips created by Nam June Paik, another promotional video on the Biennale was also included, which was to be made by the Italian artist and video maker Luciano Giaccari⁶ to be projected on large screens. The "invasion" of such advertising, artist-made videos was meant to inhabit public squares on large screens, but also on the television, with non-stop broadcasting on the Biennale on the opening night⁷. Another part of this project was *Casino Container*⁸, which

provided a media open space for artistic collaboration; nonetheless, it was shut down shortly after the Biennale's start.

The director of the 1993 Venice Biennale, Achille Bonito Oliva⁹, intended to rethink the exhibition format and present a new "image" of the Biennale. The commission to Paik was the result of a long-lasting, mutual respect between the artist and the curator («this is my present to Achille», Paik stated)¹⁰ but it was also in line with the curatorial programme¹¹. Moreover, Paik embodied the cross-pollination between disciplines and media, which was one of Bonito Oliva's main goals in this exhibition¹², alongside the practical interest in promoting the Biennale with an artistic intervention by a highly acclaimed international artist. Indeed, between the end of the Eighties and the beginning of the Nineties, the Korean artist was at the peak of his career and was celebrated and promoted in Italy¹³. Paik had a long relationship with Italy, as his first gallerist, Fernanda Bonino, exhibited the Fluxus movement in New York¹⁴. In the Sixties, Paik was often in Italy and, in 1966, he performed *26.1.1499" for a String Player* by John Cage, together with Charlotte Moorman, on a gondola boat in the canals in Venice. He returned to perform in Italy several times in the following decade¹⁵ and was again at the Biennale in 1984 in the video installations and video tapes section¹⁶. From this moment until the Biennale in 1993, Paik had numerous important exhibitions in Italy¹⁷. Bonito Oliva himself contributed to Paik's fame in Italy by curating his intervention in *Publifornia* (1988)¹⁸ together with Daniela Palazzoli, and by conceiving Paik's monographic exhibition at the Quadriennale Museum in Rome (1992) with the collector Antonina Zaru¹⁹. Paik was thus considered the most important video artist present at the 1993 Biennale.

Despite Paik's success in Italy, *Hi Tech Gondola* has not yet received critical attention and did not appear in the retrospective held in 2013 at the Galleria Civica of Modena. Therefore, the main aim of the following text is to reposition this work as part of Paik's artistic production and in relation to the curatorial content of the exhibition, leaving aside Paik's more famous intervention at the German Pavilion.

The paper is divided into three sections. After a description and analysis of the twenty-one videos that constitute the work, it analyses the methodology Paik applied in comparison with his artistic production. The final section describes Bonito Oliva's interest in commercials within the Biennale project. His programme was heavily sized down due to financial constraints, but his projects on publicity are important experiments in its use within an art exhibition.

Hi Tech Gondola

The artists representing Germany at the 45th Venice Biennale were announced in July 1992. Famously, Hans Haacke destroyed the floors in the main room of the pavilion (*Germania*, 1993), metaphorically evoking the fall of the Berlin Wall and the consequent political and geographical disruption of central and eastern Europe. To create a strident counterposition, Paik displayed indoors a wall multimonitor installation, *Electronic Super Highway: Bill Clinton stole my idea!* (1993)²⁰, while outdoors he populated the Giardini with robots and old televisions along the outside walls of the pavilion. The robots' names (*Alexander the Great* and *Genghis Khan*, among others)²¹ were a direct reference to the relationship between the Eastern and Western world, which was also one of the Biennale's main themes²².

Paik and Bonito Oliva discussed the idea of making advertisements for the Biennale in September 1992²³, when the curator toured countries in southeast Asia to select artists²⁴. The commission resulted in a bulk of commercials, collectively titled *Hi Tech Gondola*²⁵, which, in addition to Paik, included authors such as Paul Garrin²⁶, who helped arrange most of the material, and Marco Giusti²⁷, the Italian television and film critic who was then renowned for the *Blob*²⁸ television programme. The advertisements were repeatedly broadcasted during *Blob* and *Fuori Orario* on the Italian television (RAI 3 channel) over the course of the Biennale²⁹. The Biennale commercials were also intended to be circulated on major international television channels, as the way in which these commercials were submitted to the Biennale proves³⁰. The first frame, before running each video, contains the authors' names, the title, the number and a note: «add Italian Voice Over to every spot». The only text in the videos is, in fact, the full title of the exhibition, *Punti Cardinali dell'Arte*, and the opening and closing dates, together with the Biennale's logo. This is a solution that allows a voiceover to be added in any language.

The common thread in most of the videos is a computer graphic rendering of a gondola, which acts as a memory traveller, connecting the images of the city of Venice with artistic elements. The advertisements mix and overlap computer graphics, typical Venetian touristic scenes framed in pop-style hearts similar to kitsch postcards, and clips of Paik's works. Even with varying intensity from video to video, emphasis is placed on a common trajectory, which points towards the upper right corner of the screen.

All of these commercials can be considered variations on the same theme of the Biennale: travelling through time and into the future. Each video is different

from the others, but they all seem to connect as in a chain; for example, video no. 5 includes elements from the preceding video (such as the rolling balls and the sequences of Venice scenes, including San Marco Square and the Bridge of Sighs) and adds new ones, changing the way the touristic locations interact with graphics, which then turn into images of the Ducal Palace.

Regardless of this homogeneity and a recognisable discourse (which is explored in more detail below), the videos remix a large quantity of different material, mainly of Paik's past works; three different sub-groups can be identified. The first six videos³¹ play with the interrelation of the aforementioned basic elements: one of Venice's symbols and the Biennale logo, historical of Venice and performed art. Each of the first six videos begins with something that does not relate directly to the Biennale: in video no. 1, a graphic design of a city skyline; in no. 2, a close-up graphic of the fingers of Adam and God from the Sistine Chapel, a clear reference to creativity; in videos no. 3 and no. 6, excerpts from *Wrap around the World* (1988); videos no. 4 and no. 5 the rolling ball that Paik had previously used in *Publimania* (1988), completely made through the use of computer graphic effects. The main way to identify the Biennale is its logo and the writing «45 Biennale di Venezia, *Cardinal Points of Art*, 13 giugno – 10 ottobre 1993», followed or anticipated by the silhouette of the highly recognisable tails of gondolas; in some cases (as in videos nos. 1, 2, and 3), the brief view of a framed portrait of Bonito Oliva appears. The gondola is certainly the symbol of Venice, and in some of Paik's clips, it is also represented by a faster, more modern version: the taxi boat. The boat has also been redesigned as a spaceship, and it quickly takes the beholder through images of mountains and canals, as in video no. 7. Venice, which repeatedly appears both in these series and in the others, is often framed in a pulsing pop heart that resembles those found on some postcards. San Marco Square (videos nos. 2-5, and 9), the interior of the Basilica (no. 10), the Bridge of Sighs (nos. 4, 7, and 10), the Ducal Palace (nos. 1, 3, 5, 9, 16, and 18), boats streaming along the Grand Canal (no. 7-10 and 12-15) and the Rialto bridge (nos. 12-13) can be recognised as well.

Videos no. 3 and 6 have more distinctive features, as they include more extracts from concerts and utilise their music in their soundtrack. For example, in video no. 3, the song *Hier kommt Alex* is played live in Bonn by the German punk band Die Toten Hosen (1988). The repeated video frames and the use of the song as soundtrack, with the words «Here comes Alex», emphasise the expectation of a new arrival. The concert was part of *Wrap around the World* (1988), a project that Paik created during the Olympic Games in Seoul, South Korea³². The main aim of the commission was to promote international fellowship³³, and ten countries

took part in the broadcast. Paik had little intervention, and contributions to the broadcast were mainly entertainment events by design. For example, *Die Toten Hosen* played in front of Beethoven's house in Bonn, a fact that recalled Paik's own origins as a music composer.

The association of songs with the main Biennale frame sequence underlines this expectation of a new incarnation of the event and the rejuvenation of the old institution. Moreover, the video is interspersed with the shape of a human body running or performing a high jump. The close-up on the shapes of the bodies filled by the flags of different countries refers to the Olympic Games, to which the Biennale is often compared³⁴, and with which Paik was well acquainted³⁵. The association between new winds of change after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the numerous national flags immediately reminds the beholder of the pavilion structure and of the international character of the event. This effort to emphasise the positive outcome of the fall of communism in Europe³⁶ as an opening to a globalised world is one of the rhetorical devices Bonito Oliva employed³⁷. It is thus possible that Paik shared Oliva's intention to revisit the means of the international structure of the Biennale. The division into national pavilions was a much criticised aspect of the Biennale, as opposed to its main competitor, *Documenta*, which had never used pavilions. For more than thirty years, this has been a recurring discussion topic among the board of directors³⁸.

In the second group (videos no. 7-13), the main theme is voyage. Even if not exclusive to these videos, a stronger emphasis is on the moving trajectory in the sequences, which suggests a travel into time and memory. In each video, there is an element that moves, shifts and takes the beholder from one scenario to another, acting as a boat cruising from one scene to the next.

Movement is continuously enacted by different agents: by the computer-rendered gondola (video no. 8), or by the even faster taxi boat designed as a spaceship (no. 9 and 10), by the dance steps of Merce Cunningham from *Merce by Merce by Paik* (1978), by the flapping wings of a bird also used in *Internet Dream* (1994; videos no. 3, 6 and 9) or even by the crawling steps of a baby (video no. 14), slowing down until the last video (video no. 21), which instead has more of a circular movement trajectory.

Video no. 7 is made mainly of computer graphics. It opens with a rolling ball (the same as in video no. 3). Even if appropriated from *Publimania*, it can also be interpreted here as an abstract version of the round crown around the Lion of Venice, which climbs over mountains towards the lagoon. This three-dimensional reconstruction reminds the viewer of the geographical formation of the area around Venice: it is surrounded by the Alps, which can be seen on

a clear day, and travellers must cross them in order to reach the city. This is a reference to the Venetian traveller Marco Polo, who surely had to cross those mountains, a fact that resonated in that Biennale; indeed, one of Paik's robots at the Giardini was named after him. At the beginning of the Nineties, the figure of Marco Polo was revisited as a symbol of the new connection possibilities facilitated by globalisation³⁹. In those years, Marco Polo was often used as a metaphor of globalisation and mobilised as a signifier of the encounter with otherness⁴⁰. Moreover, the interconnection with the Orient was the main subject of the exhibition *Passage to the Orient*⁴¹, the first one that the visitor encountered when entering the Giardini. Passing under a re-creation of some of the Gutai installations⁴² displayed on the main road towards the central pavilion, the Orient and its protagonists would be encountered again with the robots that Paik installed around the Giardini.

In the second group of videos, and increasingly towards the end, Merce Cunningham appears in silhouette, dancing in a red catsuit. His shape in this case seems to be skating on the water of the lagoon, emphasising the idea of moving and shifting though the natural surroundings of Venice. Even if the water recalls the lagoon, the video *Merce by Merce by Paik* (1978) was realised twenty-five years earlier and has nothing to do with Venice, but the montage allows this overlapping.

Videos no. 8, 9 and 10 are mainly structured around the moving tail of the gondola. The gondola, which moves without its captain, alternates with the new fast taxi boat, which transports the beholder into the future (videos no. 9 to 13). These commercials are designed to follow the boat on a route that touches futuristic shores imagined in computer graphics, as well as real ones Cunningham walked on. Videos no. 12 and 13 are variations of the same idea, mixing a smiling John Cage (*Tribute to John Cage*, 1973-1976) as a Hollywood star in Venice with a dancing Cunningham. These themes are interrelated with a crawling child, who personifies the future in general and, in particular, that of the Biennale, as the spaceship/taxi boat does in other commercials.

The recurrence of specific scenes in the videos could be attributed to the necessity of making them recognisable, similarly to a marketing strategy used in advertising which consists in making the consumer familiar with an image or product. Paik uses the same procedure, and, even without a narrative that unfolds as chapters across the various videos, he allows the viewer to become familiar with a group of images that make the add immediately recognisable. For this reason, the viewer can see sequences that are not quite the same but that belong to the same video in a different commercial. This methodology makes

one fully recognise something that the viewer has already seen only partially. The resemblance is not coincidental, so the variation takes the viewer through the routes of reminiscence. As in memory, different images overlap times, faces and places.

Self-appropriation is a constant strategy in Paik's work⁴³, and it leads to the construction of a personal iconographic language, which can, however, be understood by any viewer. The smiling Cage, for example, is present in video no. 13 but it can also be recognised in other works. Repetition becomes a positive tool⁴⁴, and it has a variation that changes its meaning every time. Fast sequences inserted into other videos thus act as comments or suggestions, as it happens with the recurrence of elements related to creativity and art: the fingers of Adam and God from the Sistine Chapel, the close-up on the eye, the reference to Hamilton and pop art.

The third group of videos, from no. 14 to 21, uses the same methodology of mixing Venice and Paik's videos with small but crucial variations. These spots are shorter (20 seconds instead of 30) and also seem slower. The single video sequences last longer and appear to be more of a video montage than a video. Videos no. 14 to 19 present parts of Joseph Beuys, David Bowie and Laurie Anderson's performances in *Good Morning, Mr. Orwell* (1984), while video no. 20 features Charlotte Moorman playing the cello and recalling Paik's television signal distortions (taken from *Global Groove*, 1973). This last video suggests the reason for the different pace of the montage sequences and the disappearance of the Venice frames. A hypothesis could be that the famous artists that appear in these videos are highly recognisable, and there was therefore no need to insert a connection to art. The loss of information and completeness is further emphasised in the last video (no. 21), which appears on first viewing to be incomplete. It is only a short sequence (12 seconds) with no montage taken from *Bye Bye Kipling* (1986).

The slowing down of the rhythm of sequences and the progressive disappearance of Venice make us consider the commercial as a whole and as a unique discourse on vision. This reading is supported by the abrupt interruption with which the videos end, with the same long «blip», as if the connection had been lost. All twenty-one videos terminate in the same brusque way. The increasingly slow rhythm and the system of connecting each sequence to the previous video so that they somehow feed into one another make the viewer understand the group of videos as a complete work, as a unified narrative on the function of television itself⁴⁵.

The Haiku Tactic and Composition Strategy

Although *Hi Tech Gondola* was a direct commission of the Biennale⁴⁶, it is possible to grasp the step that Paik made in terms of a life-long reflection on television at this stage of his artistic career, and in terms of the advertisements analysed in this paper. When Paik arrived to exhibit his work at the 45th Biennale, he was internationally recognised as the father of video art⁴⁷. Over the years, he instigated the evolution of the medium, and he also created ground-breaking experiences in the field of satellite-based television programmes as were *Good Morning, Mr Orwell* (1984) and *Wrap around the World* (1988).

Paik had been acquainted with creating television programmes and using montage since the beginning of his career as an artist, when he was employed in 1965 at the Boston broadcasting company WGBH to produce videos on artists. In the Sixties, and especially in the United States, there was an optimistic understanding of the medium, reinforced also by the communist welcoming approach to technological progress as it would allow for socialist ownership. Paik saw television as a mean to reach people everywhere. He envisioned it as a democratic tool⁴⁸, and with this approach, he created, for example, *Good Morning, Mr Orwell*. Apparently, Paik never read Orwell's novel in its entirety, and the reference is in fact a provocative one. The satellite was intended to negate Orwell's dystopian prediction in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* of the end of a free society because of a video control system.

However, four years later, in *Wrap around the World*, Paik started adopting a more subtle and critical approach. In this work, as also in *Publimania*, created for RAI, the close use of television introduces a greater ambiguity generated by the use of self-referential language. The shift from distorting the signal to making television programmes was, for Paik, part of the same investigation into image production and communication. His engagement with television as a medium was voracious. He used the language of television, incorporating it to create television that was not in a fixed form, but that underwent continuous mutations, eliciting McLuhan's prophecy on message and medium⁴⁹.

Paik was even more triggered by the possibilities of television as a communication tool which, over time, became global. The possibility of reaching many people through television, which was popular and thus accessible to all, had been Paik's focus within this medium since *Global Groove* in 1973. His interest in the popular linked to advertisement iconography is also confirmed in *Hi Tech Gondola* video no. 17, where a quick frame of the collage by Richard Hamilton *Just What Is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?* (1956) can be seen just before the final «blip» and the black screen.

Moreover, for Paik, television and advertisement were on the same level, but he values the fact that advertisements are brief: «We ought to learn from advertising. In the same way the Japanese manage to create haiku poems, so video artists have to learn to express themselves in the space of thirty seconds. [...] My video sculptures are more popular than my recordings. For my sculptures, you only need ten seconds, twenty at the most [...] Television art, instead, is too long»⁵⁰.

Clearly, then, Paik had investigated advertisements as part of the television medium before, as in *Waiting for Commercials* (1966-1972)⁵¹. As an example, for the 1993 Biennale catalogue, he did not write any original text but printed two of his old quotations, which highlighted both the long-lasting interest in commercials and the persistence of his self-quotation strategy. The first one demonstrates Paik's interest in advertisement starting from the beginning of his artistic career: «"The word is the most profound medium" (Plato), "Sound is the most profound medium" (St. Augustin), "Sight is the most profound medium" (Spinoza)... this old controversy has been settled... commercials have all three of them (Nam June Paik, 1969)»⁵².

The second quotation is one of his most famous ones and is repeated in many interviews. He compares himself to the Mongolians: «They looked far, and then they saw a new Horizon in a far distance, they had to move on and see far more – in Greek, *Tele-vision* means to see far, seeing far = (in German) *fernsehen* = television (1972)»⁵³.

The first quotation referred not to *Hi Tech Gondola* but to *Electronic Superhighway*, which was meant to be a critical statement against Bill Clinton and the way in which he used Paik's research, produced in 1974⁵⁴. Information superhighways were being initiated at that time. According to Paik's words to Matzner, the Mongolians, Marco Polo and others started communication highways centuries before electronic communication⁵⁵. Moreover, these connoted an even greater burden for George Orwell. The expansion of the mass media would result in an even smaller global village, and the masses would become actors, performing on the world stage. The age of optical fibre as seen by Nam June Paik, however, was meant to establish a balance between civilisation and the legitimacy of tradition⁵⁶. Nevertheless, he warned, «High Tech is not a panacea. It is only a local anaesthetic»⁵⁷.

The second quotation instead refers to the robots representing Genghis Khan and others linking the theme of nomadism to the Biennale, which Paik likely should have discussed with Bonito Oliva, considering their close relationship. For example, Paik's understanding of figures such as Marco Polo resonates

clearly in the exhibition *Passage to the Orient*, which welcomed visitors at the Biennale with Gutai's installation reconstructions. Marco Polo was a symbol of conquest across the globe⁵⁸.

In the German pavilion, however, some aspects nearly on a side – comparable to the final «blip» of the commercials – were not directly addressed but question the entire work through their presence. Around the pavilion, old televisions were also displayed on the outside walls, and other machinery could be seen in a cramped room at the back, as in a studio. Some fragments of television sets were present, not functioning and not directly connected to the work; like the car with flowers inside (*Marco Polo*, 1993), the televisions on the wall were part of the environment and had grass growing next to them. As in a contemporary *natura morta*, the whole work was a *memento mori* on what is past and passing or will pass soon. Television machines become part of our natural life, and their fragments lie in our subconscious as remains of our memories. The “back” of our/his head (like the small room at the back of the pavilion), is veritable electronic entropy, just as an/his art studio. The 1999 photos of his studio by David Heald show a jam-packed space with materials that functioned as his own memory palace, fragments of things representing places he had lived and experiences he had made, which resulted in both past and present being tangible⁵⁹. His videos are part of his memory; they overlap and lead to other videos and sequences. Each video bears the memory of the previous one, and it is a memory of itself.

With this strategy, Paik explored the possibilities of the electronic image as memory. According to him, the present way of living was made of the past and the future together. He performed a critical de-structuring of the stable elements of televisual communication towards the constitution of a new image and dialectic, which always proved to be recognisable constants. A strategy of this type aligns with the Fluxus poetic, which had two fundamental ways to establish a new cultural-social environment: «useful for fast circulation on every level of a new aesthetic communication capable of reducing the distance between artists and the public, [and] soliciting the reciprocal commitment within a sole field of linguistic creative relations»⁶⁰.

In Paik's art, the transmission of knowledge and history as information art is merely an allegory that concerns an expression of sensitivity. The re-utilisation of his own works, new and old, is part of Paik's personal iconography. The sequences and figures that he uses and reuses over time in different works, mixing them with personal and impersonal images, create new meaning and associations, as in the aforementioned examples of the Biennale advertisements.

This appropriation of the images and videos is a self-reflexive strategy that Paik improved over the years, increasing this practice in his final works⁶¹. Television remixing thus becomes a tool through which to investigate reality, history and memory. The fluid form of the video becomes a practical investigation into history while, at the same time, building the future: «memory is very important to understand the future». Just a few years before the commercials were made, in an interview to Marco Maria Gazzano, Paik declared: «the video and audio artistic experiences of these years help me enter in relation with the history of humankind»⁶².

When *Hi Tech Gondola* is compared, for example, to works such as *Global Groove*⁶³, Paik appears not to have changed his strategy. What Spielmann has described as «Paik's operational mode» in that work can be applied to the Biennale's commercials too. In *Global Groove*, Paik assembled collages with extracts of television, film, advertising, recorded Fluxus actions, and live television events (particularly satellite broadcasting). All aspects of the everyday reality that are artistically staged and commercially conveyed in the television medium are homogenised, and they coalesce into a globally applicable medium of communication. All the extracts are aesthetically unified by a video-graphic configuration which changes and manipulates the material⁶⁴.

This kaleidoscope reinforces the possibilities of television for broadcasting various images and sounds from the entire world through a screen. In a way, this makes Paik's commercials not commercial at all. The videos circulated many times, but mainly in the peculiar Italian programme *Blob*, which was entirely made via the remediation of video as a social and political critique of television and society⁶⁵. The decomposition and re-composition of signals – closely borrowing from the neo-Dadaistic Fluxus actions – were part of an aesthetic self-reflexive apparatus⁶⁶, with an electronic vocabulary that Paik developed over the years and that become increasingly self-reflexive.

In principle, Paik converted the Fluxus concept of “interference” in his manipulations of television or electronic signals, as he understood television and performance as cultural forms which must be constructed. Leaving aside his early television experiments⁶⁷, Paik's strategy consisted essentially of the remediation of videos which were decomposed, altered and mixed anew. His concept of decomposition was grounded in music and found its form in the “endless” variations on the schema of television as programme⁶⁸. He said that video could fulfil Cage's dream of making a symphony without a beginning and an end⁶⁹. The result was a personal iconographic dimension of artistic language where past and present could remain together. The continuous re-mediation

and decomposition reduce his videos to units or haikus. This continuous mutation, reassembling and mounting narrative made of single video units led David Joselit to define Nam June Paik's approach to the medium as an image-virus that proliferates parasitically⁷⁰.

In Hoc Signo Vincas

The decision to commission a commercial from an artist was part of Bonito Oliva's aim, shared with the Biennale's board, to re-launch the institution's international reputation. In the Nineties, the Biennale had already become a brand⁷¹, but it was at one of the lowest points in its history in terms of visitors⁷² and international acclaim⁷³. Competition had become fierce, as other biennials grew and became well-established, *Documenta* being the leading example⁷⁴. Moreover, a low budget and bureaucratic difficulties held the institution back⁷⁵, so much that it came to be considered obsolete. However, at the same time, the Biennale's board members contemplated the reformation of its charter⁷⁶, and 1993 was therefore also a moment for imagining a new future. The aim was to re-shape the institution in time for its centennial event in 1995; thus, Bonito Oliva intended the 45th Biennale (1993) to be a trial run of what would happen in a few years. It is in this scenario that Paik's commercials must be positioned: as part of relaunching the Biennale's image. With this project in mind, Bonito Oliva wanted to redesign the whole exhibition: its display and setting, and its public image. Following experiments with Piero Sartogo in exhibitions such as *Vitalità del Negativo* (1970) and *Contemporanea* (1974-1974), he had the idea of designing the "image" of the exhibition itself.

However, due to economic difficulties, this restyling of the Biennale's image remained mostly an unachieved project. Despite this, thanks to archival findings, it is possible to understand what was meant to be part of this larger project: a landscape design project of the Giardini entrusted to Burle Marx, pedagogical projects, year-long events, and fireworks⁷⁷. The only completed projects were the enormous floating wire head horse sculpture (*Leonardo's Horse*, Ben Jacober and Yannik Vu)⁷⁸ at the entrance of the Giardini, the school for curators and Paik's advertisements.

Paik's commission to make commercials for the Biennale was not only part of a marketing strategy. Advertisement was central to Bonito Oliva's curatorial concept, to the point that he dedicated a part of his text in the catalogue to the understanding of it⁷⁹. In the chapter *The System of Publicity*⁸⁰, the curator points to the need to address the consequences of advertisement in contemporary culture.

He praises a specific trend which he calls «the neo-advertisement trend»⁸¹, and Oliviero Toscani's campaign for Benetton⁸² was presented as a poignant example. Its most important virtue, in Bonito Oliva's eyes, was the avoidance of any psychological conciliation with the spectator-consumer, and the introduction of "negative" information, since «images of hunger and death are adjacent to those of opulence and fashion in a precipitous side-by-side relationship»⁸³. The praise for this advertisement, regardless the many critiques Oliviero Toscani received for his campaigns, comes from the need not to lose contact with events. Such images present life and represent products holding on ambiguity, which is, according to Bonito Oliva words, the main feature of power. However, Paik's videos, he continues, provide a point of balance between the recovery of the significant made by contemporary art since Duchamp and the instability of neo-advertisement⁸⁴. For contemporary visitors, apart from Paik's rarely seen videos, the publicity which Bonito Oliva referred to in the catalogue was personified by Toscani, who was also exhibiting in *Aperto'93*. Specifically, it referred to a photographic wall collage of close-ups of genitals (*Immagini di consumo di massa*, 1993), something that, because of other works which rose scandal such as those of Gianfranco Gorgoni (*Concessione d'Immagine*, 1993) and Kiki Smith (*Mother/Child*, 1993), granted the Biennale the nickname of «exhibition of sex»⁸⁵.

Bonito Oliva opens his text by quoting the motto *in hoc signo vinces* («by this sign you will conquer»); pronounced by the Roman Emperor Constantine after his conversion to Christianity, those words then became associated with what would later become the primary symbol of that religion: the cross. Bonito Oliva used this expression to explain the beginning of advertisement, understood as propaganda associated with an image. With this connection, the image becomes a signifier. Parallel to this, Bonito Oliva recognised the separation of the content from the signifier as a feature of contemporaneity⁸⁶. It is on this level that Bonito Oliva was interested in such a topic as contemporary art, which «shares with advertisement the referential mentality»⁸⁷. Bonito Oliva already had this subject in the mid-Seventies and investigated it in one of his most important books, *The Ideology of the Traitor* (1989). In sum, in this essay, he takes mannerism as a metaphor for the strategy of contemporary art. For the mannerist, the image is constructed according to a figurative convention, with already existing motives and pre-established frameworks «altered and subjected to a centrifugal tension through the introduction of a multiple field of perturbations»⁸⁸.

This methodological approach, which he attributes to contemporary art production, led to his interest in advertisement, which was for Bonito Oliva the best example of what he called post-television. Moreover, this methodology

characterised his entire understanding of the 45th Biennale, which he repeatedly called “exhibition-zapping”, a “post-television exhibition” or, more often, a “mosaic exhibition”⁸⁹. The emphasis is thus on survey and fragmentation, with no beginning and no end, in which the viewer makes his own choices in putting together, choosing and zapping from artwork to artwork. According to Judith Barry, the spectator’s creativity lies precisely in this act of consuming⁹⁰. Other fellow words of Bonito Oliva’s methodology were pluralism, multidisciplinary and cross-pollination, which were meant to enchant this unplanned experience. In the same way, since *Participation TV* (1969), Paik manipulated television images and invited the viewer to do the same⁹¹.

Bonito Oliva and Paik’s common understanding of the role of television and exhibition-making resulted in a reshuffling of image units that Andrew Hoskins, while writing on the crucial role of television⁹², later described more accurately: «television transcribes memory and history into artificial form, then what is required is a *re-transcription* of the media’s lexical and visual imagery into something recognisable as new memory»⁹³. Such new memory has the characteristic of being collective and shared, of being made of nostalgic journeys, in which the boundaries between inside and outside, past and future are blurred.

- 1 The official name of the Pavilion was German Federal Pavilion. The commissioner was Klaus Bußmann and the adjunct commissioner Florian Matzner.
- 2 «Premio Paesi consistente in un Leone d’oro, al Padiglione della Germania che presenta due artisti di diversa nazionalità: Hans Haacke e Nam June Paik nello spirito Trans-nazionale di questa Biennale». La Biennale di Venezia, Archivio Storico delle arti contemporanee (ASAC), Fondo Storico, deposito, b. 116. Hereafter ASAC, FS, dep.
- 3 This is the title that appears on the video at the ASAC and at ZKM, Center for Arts and Media. In the Biennale catalogue, instead, the work is titled *High Tech Gondolas*, perhaps by mistake.
- 4 ASAC, FS, dep., b. 115.
- 5 *PLOT ART* was directed by Alessandra Mammi, Luciano Giaccari, Paolo Luciani and Marco Giusti. After many economic difficulties, the programme was sized down and in the end the screens were not installed, *Minutes III meeting of Board of Directors (19 March 1993)*, ASAC, FS, dep., b. 121, pp. 140-170.
- 6 Luciano Giaccari was also present with his video archive which is an important and early attempt of video taxonomy. The project, called *MUel – Museo Elettronico*, was exhibited in the Central Pavilion of the Giardini.
- 7 The non-stop broadcasting on the Biennale wasn’t realised, instead a programme on the history of the Biennale was broadcasted on Rai 3 Italian Television (12 June 1993).
- 8 The full title was *Casino Container Electronic Café International*. This was a collective work in which about sixty individual projects, artists, designers, musicians, architects, writers, and critics researched, discussed and analysed the changed potentials of technology and

- production. The *Electronic Café* was realised at Cologne's Mediapark too. See <http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/electronic-cafe/>, last accessed 18 August 2020.
- 9 *Minutes of the LIX Meeting of the Board of Directors (22 May 1992)*, ASAC, FS, dep., b 112.
 - 10 N. Paik, *Interview with Nam June Paik*, in *Il Novecento di Nam June Paik*, exh. cat. (Roma, Palazzo delle Esposizioni, 11-29 November 1992), ed. by M. Gazzano, A. Zaru, Roma, 1992, p. 131.
 - 11 Since the presentation of the programme to the Board of Directors there is this intention. «Attachment no. 4.2.1. XLV International Exhibition of Art. Cultural project (23 September 1992)» in ASAC, FS, dep., b. 116.
 - 12 A. Bonito Oliva, *Cardinal Points of Art*, in *45. Esposizione internazionale d'arte: Punti cardinali dell'arte / La Biennale di Venezia*, exh. cat. (Venezia, La Biennale di Venezia, 16 June – 10 October 1993), Venezia, 1993, vol. 3, pp. 9-10.
 - 13 *Il Novecento di Nam June Paik*, cit.
 - 14 *Exhibition at Bonino Gallery*, in «Arts Magazine», 42, 1968, p. 63; *Exhibition at Bonino Gallery*, in «Art News», 67, May 1968, p. 56.
 - 15 Paik organized performances in Asolo in 1974 as *Zen Smile* or *Kosugi Chamber Music*, with Charlotte Moorman in the wine yards.
 - 16 See 41. *Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte: Arte e Arti, Attualità e Storia*, exh. cat. (Venezia, La Biennale di Venezia, 11 June – 9 September 1984), ed. by M.G. Gervasoni, Venezia, 1984.
 - 17 *Nam June Paik in Italia*, exh. cat., (Modena, Galleria Civica, Palazzo Santa Margherita, Palazzina dei Giardini, 16 February – 2 June 2013), ed. by S. Ferrari, S. Goldoni, M. Pierini, Milano, 2013.
 - 18 Nam June Paik created two sceneries for this Rai Television program, Teche Rai, in 1988.
 - 19 The exhibition *Il Novecento di Nam June Paik. Arti elettroniche, cinema e media verso il XXI secolo* (Roma - Palazzo delle Esposizioni, 11-29 November 1992) was curated by Antonina Zaru, Marco Maria Gazzano and Achille Bonito Oliva.
 - 20 In the catalogue Paik explains how he developed the idea of an Electronic Superhighway as early as 1974 in his text *Media Planning for the Post-Industrial Society*, showing how in 1992 Bill Clinton used a “Data Superhighway” as the central plank of his election campaign. See 45. *Esposizione internazionale d'arte*, cit., vol. 1, pp. 172-177.
 - 21 Paik exhibited a number of Robots around the Giardini inspired by important historical protagonists of the exchanges of East and West as: Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, Catherine the Great, Attila the Hun. See P. Mellencamp, *The Old and the New: Nam June Paik*, in «Art Journal», 4, 1995, pp. 41-47, esp. p. 44-45.
 - 22 Bonito Oliva, 45. *Esposizione internazionale d'arte*, cit., vol. 3.
 - 23 ASAC, FS, dep., b. 111.
 - 24 J.F. Andrews, *Asia Art Archive Conference. Sites of Construction: Exhibitions and the Making of Recent Art History in Asia. Exhibition as Site—Extended Case Study (China 1993) Why 1993? Coincidence or Convergence?*, in «Yishu. Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art», 3, 2014, p. 50.
 - 25 Video frames of *Hi Tech Gondola* are a crucial part of this paper. Unfortunately, it was not possible to include them due to the high reproduction costs. Some images are available at <<https://zkm.de/en/artwork/hi-tech-gondola>>, last accessed 8 November 2020.

- 26 Paul Garrin was Paik's assistant until 1996. See payments records, American Art Paik Archive, Smithsonian American Art Museum, b. 5, f. 10.
- 27 Marco Giusti is misspelled on the video clips as «Mr. Giustti». Marco Giusti was an important part of the larger project *PLOT ART* since he broadcasted the advertisements. His contribution to the production of *Hi Tech Gondola* was only related to an event. After meeting Paik in Venice in autumn 1992 he sent him a series of registrations of Venice and the Biennale which were partly used in the videos (interview with the author, 15 September 2018).
- 28 *Blob* is a satiric programme broadcasted on Rai 3 Television since 1989. The programme, which recalls the title of a horror, sci-fi film of 1958 *The Blob*, uses montage of many different sources of videos, tv news and programmes.
- 29 E. Tantucci, *Anteprima su "Fuori Orario" Ventuno spot per la Biennale di Bonito Oliva. Regista è June Paik*, in «La nuova Venezia», 19 May 1993, p. 13.
- 30 This information was confirmed by Marco Giusti (interview with the author, 15 September 2018).
- 31 The numbering refers to the actual number assigned at the beginning of each video. This numbering does not give any information about the order in which they were realised or had to be broadcasted.
- 32 This was an important moment for the official recognition of the artist in Korea. On this occasion he also realised an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in Seoul, where he mounted the installation *The More the Better* (1988) made of 1003 monitors.
- 33 For images of the project check <<http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/wrap-around-the-world/>>, last accessed 20 August 2020.
- 34 This comparison occurs many times. See *The Venice Biennale: Olympics of the Art World*, in Artsper Magazine, 2019, <<https://blog.artspers.com/en/lifestyle/the-venice-biennale-olympics-of-the-art-world/>>, last accessed 20 August 2020; or J. Benhamouhuet, *Venice Biennale (2): the Olympic Games for contemporary art. And the winners are...*, in Judith Benhamouhuet reports, 2019, <<https://judithbenhamouhuet.com/venice-biennale-2-the-olympic-games-for-contemporary-art-and-the-winners-are/>>, last accessed 20 August 2020.
- 35 ASAC, FS, dep., b. 405, pp. 9-11.
- 36 The main consequence of the fall of the Berlin Wall was the political reconfiguration of Europe. In particular Europe was shaken by the atrocities of the war in the Balkans. At the Biennale this situation was made visible by the pavilions of East Germany and Yugoslavia, which were not used by any country because no agreement on ownership was made. In particular in the ex-Yugoslavia pavilion Bonito Oliva organised an exhibition dedicated to peace.
- 37 Bonito Oliva, *45. Esposizione internazionale d'arte*, cit., vol. 3, p. 13.
- 38 Paik certainly was very much interested in the possibilities given by satellite and television programmes, see Mellencamp, *The Old and the New*, cit., p. 42. C. Ricci, *From Obsolete to Contemporary: National Pavilions and the Venice Biennale*, in «Journal of Curatorial Studies», vol. 9, 1, 2020, pp. 8-39; DOI https://doi.org/10.1386/jcs_00009_1.
- 39 G. Mosquera, *The Marco Polo Syndrome: Some Problems around Art and Eurocentrism*, in «Third Text», 21, 1992, pp. 34-41.

- 40 The symposium *The Marco Polo Syndrome. Problems of intercultural communication in art theory and curatorial practice* was curated by Gerhard Haupt in collaboration with Bernd M. Scherer and was held in Berlin at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt (11-12 April 1995).
- 41 *Passage to the Orient* was organised by Virginia Baradel, Francesca Dal Lago, Giacinto di Pietrantonio, Li Xianting, Marco Meneguzzo, Roland Sabatier, Kazuo Yamawaki. The exhibition was held in three different venues (Giardini, Padiglione Venezia and Padiglione Israele); it presented the French group Lettrisme, Gutai, Yoko Ono, Shigeko Kubota, a group of young Chinese painters, Russian artists (Ispezione Medermeneutica), and Jiro Yoshihara.
- 42 The installations were remakes of those realised at Ashiya woods, near Osaka, in 1955 and 1956.
- 43 Y. Spielmann, *Video: The Reflexive Medium*, Cambridge, 2010.
- 44 Mellencamp, *The Old and the New*, cit., p. 45.
- 45 A. Mammi, *Najpax*, in *45. Esposizione internazionale d'arte*, cit., vol. 2, pp. 987-989.
- 46 ASAC, FS, dep., b. 115.
- 47 F. Matzner, *A Short Trip on the Electronic Superhighway with Nam June Paik*, in *Nam June Paik: eine data base, la Biennale di Venezia, 45. esposizione internazionale d'arte, 13.6-10.10.1993, German Pavilion = Deutscher Pavillon* exh. cat. (Venezia, La Biennale di Venezia, 16 June – 10 October 1993), ed. by N. Paik, K. Bußmann, F. Matzner, Stuttgart, 1993, pp. 116-143, esp. p. 117.
- 48 W. Kaizen, *Against Immediacy: Video Art and Media Populism*, Hanover (NH), 2016, p. 77.
- 49 M. McLuhan, Q. Fiore, *The medium is the message*, New York, 1967.
- 50 D. Palazzoli, *Intervista con Nam June Paik*, in *Nam June Paik. Lo sciamano del Video*, ed. by G. Di Maggio, D. Stella, Milano, 1994, pp. 105-111.
- 51 *Waiting for Commercials*, by Nam June Paik and Jud Yalkut (1966-1972), 6:41 minutes, color, sound, 16 mm film on video.
- 52 Bonito Oliva, *45. Esposizione internazionale d'arte*, cit., vol. 1, p. 176.
- 53 *Ibidem*.
- 54 Matzner, *A Short Trip on the Electronic Superhighway*, cit., p. 130.
- 55 *Ivi*, p. 126.
- 56 Spielmann, *Video*, cit.
- 57 N. Paik, *Rendez-vous Celeste (1984/1986/1988)*, in *The electronic Super Highway: Travels with Nam June Paik*, exh. cat. (Cincinnati, Carl Solway Gallery, 5-30 March 1995), ed. by N. Paik, Cincinnati, 1995, pp. 141-143, quote from p. 143.
- 58 L. Sook-Kyung, *Nam June Paik: Transforming Cultures, Connecting the World*, in *Nam June Paik*, exh. cat. (London, Tate Modern, 17 October 2019 – 9 February 2020), ed. by L. Sook-Kyung, R. Frielin, London, 2019, pp. 9-25, esp. p. 9.
- 59 J.G. Hanhardt, *The Textual Worlds of Nam June Paik: The Time of Writing and Reading*, in *We are in Open Circuits. Writings by Nam June Paik*, ed. by J.G. Hanhardt, G. Zinman, E. Decker-Philips, Cambridge (MA), 2019, pp. 1-19, esp. p. 5.
- 60 Spielmann, *Video*, cit.

- 61 See M. Chan, *Nam June Paik's prophetic final works at Gagosian Hong Kong – in pictures*, 25 September 2015, <<https://artradarjournal.com/2015/09/25/nam-june-paik-retrospective-gagosian-hong-kong-in-pictures/>> last accessed 2 August 2020.
- 62 Paik, *Interview*, cit., p. 28, translation by the author.
- 63 USA, 1973, 18:30 minutes, colour, sound.
- 64 Spielmann, *Video*, cit., p. 5-10.
- 65 A. Magri, *Di Blob in Blob. Analisi di semiotica comparata. Cinema Tv e Linguaggio del corpo*, Roma, 2009.
- 66 O. Smith, *Fluxus: The History of an Attitude*, San Diego, 1998.
- 67 *Early TV Experiments* by Nam June Paik. Filmed by Jud Yakult, USA, 1965-1971.
- 68 B. Ha, *A Pioneer of Interactive Art: Nam June Paik as Musique Concrète Composing Researcher*, in «ISEA 2015. Proceedings of the 21st International Symposium on Electronic Art», pp. 777-783 <http://www.isea-archives.org/docs/2015/proceedings/ISEA2015_proceedings.pdf>, last accessed 2 August 2020.
- 69 Paik, *Rendez-vous Celeste*, cit.
- 70 D. Joselit, *Feedback: Television against democracy*, Cambridge, 2007.
- 71 P. Girone, *La logica dello Sponsor*, Milano, 1989.
- 72 There were around 100,000 visitors in 1990. In 1993 their number rose to 270,000.
- 73 M. Vecco, *La Biennale di Venezia, Documenta di Kassel*, Milano, 2002; M. Sassatelli, *La Biennale: dal rilancio urbano a Piattaforma di cultura globale*, «POLISPOLIS», 1, 2013, pp. 29-53, esp. p. 29.
- 74 A. Cestelli Guidi, *La «Documenta» di Kassel. Percorsi dell'arte contemporanea*, Milano, 1997.
- 75 This situation was the consequence of many years of economic and organizational difficulties constantly discussed at the Board of Directors, La Biennale di Venezia, ASAC, FS, dep., Materiali Consiglio Direttivo 1986-1992.
- 76 The commission to reform the Biennale was formed in 1992 and drafted a new charter which nevertheless will only be approved in 1998. See «Esame progetto riforma statuto Ente per trasmissione Ministeri competenti», ASAC, FS, dep., b. 119.
- 77 ASAC, FS, dep., b. 113.
- 78 In the Nineties this area was still perceived as on the town outskirts. The sculpture was visible already from the Bridge of Sighs, close to the Ducal Palace in San Marco Square and immediately recognisable.
- 79 Bonito Oliva, *45. Esposizione internazionale d'arte*, cit., vol. 3, pp. 18-20.
- 80 Bonito Oliva's text in the catalogue draws from the book on the art system he wrote in 1975. See A. Bonito Oliva, *Arte e sistema dell'arte*, Pescara, 1975
- 81 Bonito Oliva, *45. Esposizione internazionale d'arte*, cit., vol. 3, p. 19.
- 82 Oliviero Toscani, photographer and press agent, was the artistic director for the Italian group Benetton. In those years he realised controversial advertisements such as those which involved the use of a photo showing a murder victim of the Mafia covered with a white cloth surrounded by a chorus of silent women dressed in black.
- 83 Bonito Oliva, *45. Esposizione internazionale d'arte*, cit., vol. 3, p. 19.
- 84 *Ivi*, p. 20.

- 85 See for example F. Fanelli, *Gloomy revelling in sex and politics*, in «The Art Newspaper», 30, 1993, pp. 15-22.
- 86 *Ivi*, p. 18.
- 87 *Ibidem*.
- 88 A. Bonito Oliva, *The Ideology of the Traitor: Art, Manner and Mannerism*, Milano, 1989 (first published in 1977), p. 11.
- 89 He used these phrases on several different occasions, see for example in A. Elkann, *La mia Biennale, un capolavoro, intervista con Achille Bonito Oliva*, in «La Stampa», 189, 12 July 1993, p. 10; or in Bonito Oliva, *45. Esposizione internazionale d'arte*, cit., vol. 3, p. 10.
- 90 J. Barry, *Casual Imagination, in Blasted Allegories*, ed. by B. Wallis, Cambridge (MA), 1987, pp. 336-360.
- 91 *TV_ARTS_TV, The Television Shot by Artists Exhibition*, ed. by V. Valentini, Barcelona, 2010, p. 13.
- 92 J.F.G. Lozano, *Television memory after the end of television history?*, in *Television Theory Today Edited*, ed. by M. de Valck, J. Teurlings, Amsterdam, 2013, p. 131.
- 93 A. Hoskins, *New memory: Mediating history*, in «Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television», 4, 2001, pp. 333-346, esp. p. 341.