

ANALYSIS, DOCUMENTATION, ARCHIVING

INTRODUCTION

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After having discussed various historical and theoretical approaches to understanding the complexities of media art in part one, the second part of this book focuses in more detail on analyzing, documenting, and archiving media art. Before being able to identify appropriate strategies for preserving and restoring film-, video-, or computer-based artworks – the topic of part three – or determining suitable exhibition modes – discussed in part four – it is necessary to first capture the exact nature and appearance of the original work.

Whereas the conservation, restoration, and exhibition of classical artworks like painting and sculpture generally primarily raises material problems (investigating the types of materials used, determining the best lighting conditions, etc.), the preservation and exhibition of contemporary time-based media artworks also raises the more fundamental question of exactly where to locate the work. For example, if an artist uses television consoles from the 1970s in an installation, like Miquel-Ángel Cárdenas in *25 Caramboles* (1979/80), can one replace them with contemporary flat screen monitors in a contemporary exhibition (see Van Saaze/NIMK, 2003)? In other words, before being able to decide on preservation and exhibition strategies, a conservator or curator needs to reflect on which material or conceptual components are most relevant for doing justice to the work.

Chapter 5 provides a reflection on the process of describing and analyzing media art, and aims to provide the reader with concrete tools for capturing the identity of media artworks. The analysis of media artworks is aimed at develop-

ing a rational argument which tries to reflect upon the works' configurations and sharable meanings. This is crucial in the practices of conservation and exhibition, both highly dialogical processes involving conservators, curators, the artist(s), and specialists (such as programmers, technicians, laboratory staff, etc.). The analysis of artworks is aimed at describing and interpreting the coherence between their material organization and conceptual layers, as well as linking them to the larger cultural and social contexts in which they appear. This chapter provides a clear road map for analyzing media artworks by distinguishing four moments of analysis: description, analysis, interpretation, and judgment. This four-step analysis is demonstrated with the help of an analysis of Harun Farocki's video installation *Workers Leaving the Factory in 11 Decades* (2006).

Chapter 6 focuses on one of the key elements in the preservation and reexhibition of media artworks: documentation. Because of their reliance on technologies that are subject to rapid obsolescence, as well as their often process-based, performative, and/or interactive nature, media artworks rely for their survival on documentation of their creation, exhibition, appearance, functionality, and experience. As argued in the first section of chapter 6, performative works like *Uncle Roy All Around You* (2003) by Blast Theory can only be recreated when the documentation created by the artists is taken into consideration. The artist interview, demonstrated in section three with reference to the audio-installation *Mbube* (2005) by Roberto Cuoghi, is a strategy for obtaining information on the creation process where documentation is lacking. Sometimes documentation is the only thing that is left of a work, as in the case of the ephemeral work *e così sia...* (2000) by Bruna Esposito discussed in section four, where the video documentation comes to stand in for the lost original. Finally, Van Saaze's ethnographic study of the acquisition by the Van Abbemuseum of *No Ghost Just a Shell* (1999/2002) by Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno in section two of this chapter shows how the specific limitations of a museum's content management system can impact the way an artwork is defined, demonstrating the need to consider documentation in the wider, institutional context of describing, analyzing, and archiving media artworks.

REFERENCE

Van Saaze, Vivian, and Netherlands Media Art Institute, Montevideo/TBA. "Reader – Of Reinstallation and Preservation of 25 *Caramboles and Variations: Birthday Present for a 25-Year Old* (1979/80), Miguel-Ángel Cárdenas, Collection Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam." Report on this case study in the research project *404 Object Not Found: What remains of Media Art?* and the exhibition *Thirty Years Dutch Video Art*, 11 January-8 March 2003. Amsterdam: Netherlands Media Art Institute and Montevideo/TBA. Available online – http://nimk.nl/_files/Files/cardenas_report_nimk_en.pdf. Last access: 12 July 2012.

