

Methodologies of Multimedial Documentation and Archiving

6.1 ENJOYING THE GAP: COMPARING CONTEMPORARY DOCUMENTATION STRATEGIES¹

| 149

Annet Dekker

Documentation is the process of gathering and organizing information about a work, including its condition, its content, its context, and the actions taken to preserve it. For the writing of art history one used to be able to rely on the art objects. When artworks become prone to obsolescence or are only meant to exist for a short period, documentation is the only thing people can fall back on. The traditional documentation strategy for the conservation of art is focused on describing the object, in the best objective way possible. But conservation as a practice is not as fixed as one might assume, and hence documentation strategies tend to vary a lot. Needless to say, like any other form of representation, documentation will always be arbitrary and incomplete in relation to the artwork. By analyzing the documentation practice of the performance group Blast Theory, I will argue in the first part of this chapter that documents (such as texts, videos, still images, instructions, etc.) can sometimes communicate more about a work and how it is experienced than its physical manifestation can.

In the second part of this chapter I will focus on documentation as a tool in conservation. Despite the recognized fact that media art will not survive or endure over time due to its often ephemeral and obsolescent nature, many conservators attempt to fix the processual and fluid nature of these works. I will compare various documentation strategies that are used in traditional museum structures and those developed by other organizations dealing with

conservation. The analyses will be compared to Blast Theory's project *Uncle Roy All Around You* (2003). Instead of working towards an object-oriented approach of fixation, by referring to current artists' practices, in this case Blast Theory, I propose to focus on preserving and documenting the process and experience of a work: that is, keeping the memory alive but accepting a loss in history. Furthermore, I argue that documenting media art requires a new understanding of conservation theory, which will have an influence on current documentation methodologies in conservation.

In order to analyze what documentation consists of, I will first briefly trace the meaning of "document." The term document is used in various contexts, often referring to different things. I will concentrate on the development of the meaning of "document" in as far as it connects and is relevant to the practice of conservation of multimedia artworks.²

From Document to Documentation in Conservation

The word "document" derives from the Latin verb *docere*, which means to learn, show, and inform, as well as *documentum* that signifies instruction and/or teaching.³ Although we have lost this sense of *documentum*, meaning something that teaches or informs, the root of the word shows that the original Latin meaning was not just an object, but rather a testimony, an example, an instructive demonstration of some principle or idea (Windfeld Lund, 2003). From the 17th century onwards, it was the emergence of the European state bureaucracy which became an essential part of the creation of a public bureaucracy across and independent of local customs, that added two other meanings to the word document. Firstly, a document was constituted as a written object that states and provides transactions, agreements, and decisions that are made by citizens. This in turn implicated the second notion, the document as proof – turning the authenticity of the document into a subject of investigation (Windfeld Lund, 2003). However, it was not until the 1900s that a new professional was born: the documentalist.⁴ Notable in this respect are the writings by Paul Otlet, *Traité de documentation* (1934), and Suzanne Briet, *Qu'est-ce que la documentation* (1951). Both argued for an expanded notion of the document that would include artifacts, natural objects, and works of arts; documents were regarded as examples or groupings of things that derive meaning from their context.

Although the term is used differently in museology, conservation, art history, and the art trade (Fluegel, 2001), documentation in the field of art is generally understood as the process of gathering and organizing information about a work, including its condition, its content, its context and the actions

taken to preserve it. At present, several types of documentation can be distinguished: first, documentation produced for publicity and presentation; second, for purposes of reconstruction or preservation; third, for describing processual changes in the appearance of a work; fourth, for developing an aesthetical and/or a historical “framework” or reference; fifth, for educational purposes; sixth, for capturing audience experiences; and seventh, for capturing the creative or working process of the artist(s). In conservation practices, documentation is primarily used for reconstruction and preservation. The traditional documentation strategy for the conservation of art is focused on describing the artwork in the best objective way possible. In some cases, intuitive knowledge (information about the artists’ intent and aesthetic and historical considerations) is taken into account, but most methodologies rely on material measurements, emphasizing a way of structuring, a use of systems and logic that is reminiscent of scientific research.⁵ With the arrival of more and more live, ephemeral, networked, processual, and obsolete works of art, documentation – as the physical remaining trace of a work – became the center of conservation strategies, and new ways of thinking about documentation practice emerged.⁶ Moreover, the instable character of media art often grants documentation the status of the only remaining trace of the work (Depocas, 2001). At the same time, the notion that documentation is a subjective process where selection criteria are of great importance is more widely acknowledged.⁷

| 151

What happens with documentation after it has been produced? As said before, in most museum practices the core of documentation strategies is focused on the preservation of a work. Other documentation, for example, flyers or video that are produced for publicity and presentation, is also kept but is often regarded as being of secondary importance and stored in the “documentation archive” instead of the “collection archive.” As such, for a long time the documentation was not considered of great relevance for the recreation of a work. By focusing on artists’ documentation strategies, I will show that material in a documentation archive can actually be very helpful when recreating or presenting a work.

Blast Theory: An Individual Case

Blast Theory is renowned internationally as one of the most adventurous artists’ groups using interactive media, creating groundbreaking new forms of performance and interactive art that mixes audiences across the Internet, live performance, and digital broadcasting. The UK-based artists group is led by Matt Adams, Ju Row Farr, and Nick Tandavanitj. From the early 1990s, they have explored and questioned the social, cultural, and political facets and

influences of technology. Blast Theory confronts a media-saturated world in which popular culture rules, using performance, installation, video, mobile, and online technologies to ask questions about the ideologies present in the information that envelops us. Their art- and research-focused interactive projects have been created for gallery, street, and television spaces. Their most recent work centers on conceiving new uses for location-aware technologies (such as navigational instruments) in public spaces, creating non-commercial content by means of already-present technologies. Blast Theory's interest and use of technology, and the innovative possibilities that arise from this, stems from an interest in communication.⁸ They approach technology as an ideology, a constraint, a cultural space, a communication medium, or platform and not only as a mere device.

A survey of their works offers a number of different case study possibilities for examining documentation strategies. For the purpose of this research I selected their work *Uncle Roy All Around You* that premiered in London at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London in 2003. Being part of a large funding program, *Uncle Roy All Around You* required extensive documentation. Because they had to work and communicate with different collaborators from various fields on different levels, the documentation strategies were also diverse. This made the project into an interesting case because the different angles demonstrate the various aspects of documentation problems that occur in relation to media artworks. What this case will show above all is how documentation functions in the work of artists: in the conceptual and production phases as well as in the presentation, archival, and possible future preservation phases. As such, the case could serve to complicate the issue of documentation in preservation further, necessitating an expansion of the term into different types, and the different phases in which documentation of these different types occurs.

Uncle Roy All Around You is a mixed reality game played by players in the street of a city, and online by players in a virtual city. The city space of the online environment is an exact replica of the actual city space. Finding Uncle Roy is the mission of the game, where online players and players in the street work together to find him. Using handheld computers, the street players are sent on a quest around the city, being offered directions by Uncle Roy via the devices (see Fig. 6.1 in color section). When the street players start they state their location using the handheld computer, where an avatar of them is revealed in the virtual world as a direct correlation to their physical location (see Fig. 6.2 in color section). Here, online players can select street players, enabling them to send private messages to them including assistance in finding Uncle Roy, and street players can choose whether or not to send audio messages back. At the end of the game after street players have been led to various locations through messages by Uncle Roy, online players and street players are asked a series of

questions regarding trusting strangers and whether or not they would make a commitment to someone they don't know. Online and street players who agree to make a commitment to the unfamiliar person are then matched up and offered the opportunity to meet face-to-face.⁹

The Value and Meaning of Documentation in Artists' Practice: Blast Theory¹⁰

Blast Theory has a rather extensive and meticulous documentation process during both the period of creating the work and presenting it. As one of its founding members, Matt Adams, states, "those bits of documentation have to do multiple jobs for us – they are marketing things, explanatory tools, and appendices to the research, they act as records." As such, documentation exists beyond the time of the work and testifies to the company's creative process and practice. Considering documentation as both testimony and a tool for making decisions about the nature of the work, I am following the assumption that what is documented and how this is documented reveal the framework within which artists understand, conceive, and develop their work.

| 153

Part of Blast Theory's practice and creative working process is to be constantly inventive and flexible in terms of techniques and strategies. They sometimes start from a thematic or narrative perspective and other times from a set of questions or issues that they would like to tackle, or a particular kind of experience they would like to explore. In the conceptualization and development of their projects, Blast Theory employs a number of methods and strategies. While they have stated a number of times that they would not say they have any coherent or continuous methodology – that working methods are contingent on the project at hand – a common thread is the methods they do use (although varied) work within a process that attempts to maintain the creative fluidity of a project's development. I discerned three different phases in which documentation played an important role. I define these, often parallel, stages as follows: *documentation as process*, in which documentation is seen as a tool in decision-making processes during the development of the work; *documentation as presentation*, or, the creation of audiovisual material about the work; and, *documentation for recreation* in the future.

DOCUMENTATION AS PROCESS

Documentation as process refers to the notion of documentation as a tool for making decisions about the nature of the work. Blast Theory places the malle-

ability of a work's development as key to their creative process: any "method" that appears too static – that would possibly hinder the expansion and growth of ideas in any direction – is a territory hardly ventured into by the group. Even up until the very moment of presentation, Blast Theory is highly reliant on oral communication as a creative medium, using conversation as a way to develop and flesh out ideas with one another. As Adams outlined, oral storytelling is used as a way to find the core elements of a project they are working on. Referring to the conceptual development process of scriptwriter Paul Schrader, Adams states that never writing anything down and just telling people the story allows a space for things that are extraneous, or "superfluous" to a story, to naturally be removed or "fall away" over time, leaving the core elements. Furthermore, by abstaining from writing too much down they all gained equal access to the work. In Adams' words: "It means that the project stays mobile."

154 |

While the creative flexibility afforded by development through conversation is integral to Blast Theory's way of working, they do often find a necessity to textually communicate complex ideas and relations to one another, particularly when they are dealing with a project like *Uncle Roy All Around You* that involves both online players and players in the physical world. They have increasingly turned to using whiteboards for this purpose. The whiteboard allows them to write down ideas and issues they are working with that day, photograph it for documentation, then wipe it clean for the next session and start again from scratch. They have also employed private notebooks, allowing each member to individually jot down ideas, and then type them up and share those they feel are important.

In the development process Blast Theory employs a number of creative strategies to develop their works including creating questionnaires, interviews, role playing exercises for each other, paper tests, and trails through the city. For example, during a residency at Banff New Media Institute just over a year before the release of *Uncle Roy*, the three core members of the group each designed different questionnaires, interviews, and exercises for each other. For example, Ju Row Farr designed a questionnaire and interview for the other Blast Theory members exploring their relationship to the city, with questions like: Where do you walk? How close to the building do you walk? Where do you put your arms when you're walking? Do you look at other people? How do you feel on city streets? Through these "role-playing exercises" they realized they shared a similar sense of detachment in the spaces they often frequent. These exercises thus lead to further conceptualization of the piece. Besides, they also conduct interviews with people external to the project in order to develop different aspects of the project. These exercises and the group's reflection on them enable the group to try and consider what people in the game play would and would not do, whilst aiming to create a process that is not too difficult and mentally stimulating.

Testing is another documentation method in the process and development of the technological aspects of their projects. Blast Theory test the characteristics and possibilities of mobile devices by creating a series of interface prototypes and devices to test whether or not they correspond to the concept of the specific project, and whether they feel these technologies are accessible to a broad public in understanding their use. Members of Blast Theory are often the first testers and at varying stages in the development participants from outside are brought in to test the setup devices. Sometimes they invite testers with a deep knowledge of the technology to get precise and descriptive feedback.

It is interesting to see that the emphasis on oral communication is reflected in their internal working process. Their ambivalence towards written documents, which according to them often leads to a hierarchical structure with the person in charge of the writing having more power and control over the process, shows the importance of having an equal collaboration of decision-making and conceptual and design development within the group. This working process of creating a non-hierarchical and decentralized internal structure is thus informed by a desire for openness and fluidity within the conceptual development of a work.

| 155

DOCUMENTATION AS PRESENTATION

By referring to “documentation as presentation” I am focusing on the material that is made by Blast Theory to explain and communicate their work. Such documentation can be a manifestation of a registered or captured event and can take on many forms: notation, mapping, written description, photography, film, or video.¹¹ Audiovisual recordings provide us with a unique perspective on the history of art, a perspective that moves beyond the image in a book, words on paper, or abstract notations. They provide us with a fuller sense of what it was like to be there and then. Needless to say, with media art consisting of multiple objects, interactive components, or uses of multiple spaces (real and virtual), the use of video documentation can be extremely valuable, especially when trying to capture the working of a piece or show the experience it evokes with the audience. Nevertheless, as Adams remarked, it is not something that is easy to do. Referring to the video documentation that was produced for their interactive virtual reality-based piece *Desert Rain* he explains: “The problem here was to register the non-linear character of the piece. Therefore, the crucial question was how to bring together examples of different types of footage (and not so much which “bits” to use) so that the non-linear character of the piece would be sufficiently “represented” (Lycouris, 2000).

Nor is video documentation uncontested. Especially in case of live performance art and dance, video documentation (or even other forms of documentation) is seen as betraying the vivacity of the art form. The prospect of experiencing a mediated performance, even in written words, has disturbed many performance art scholars.¹² Obviously any form of documentation will be a substitute for the original, but perhaps there are other ways of thinking about documentation. For example, can or should documentation evoke its absent object or event, or would it be enough to provide an impression or translate the atmosphere? Is it possible to think of an expanded understanding of documentation as presentation?

When it comes to capturing or documenting the final result, the live event, Blast Theory try as best as possible to show people the atmosphere of the experience, as Adams states: "It's about getting that atmosphere correct where you can imaginatively engage with what it must have felt like to do that or be there." The audiovisual documentation is partly directed, taking the point of view of one player and following that person while s/he is playing the game – at times asking the player to repeat a movement, but at the same time trying to be as unobtrusive as possible. Becky Edmunds, a "specialist dance videographer" for among others Blast Theory, tries "to enjoy the gap" between the live and the recorded by "providing small pieces of information through which a viewer might be able to actively reconstruct an imagined version, myth, or memory of what the event might have been."¹³ Edmunds is not interested in providing the viewer with an "authentic" recording, and by showing restricted views of the body or small glimpses of the action, she even draws attention to the gaps that documentation creates. Moreover, she is not trying to assess how the artist wants her to document the work; Edmunds engages with the work as being inside and part of the work, instead of being a neutral outsider. This approach reveals a new way of thinking about documentation that reflects the process of the event while at the same time informing the work and serving as a way to preserve "tacit" knowledge.¹⁴ Documentation is thus regarded as an important aspect of the process, which can be as creative and as challenging as the live event.¹⁵ In this way documentation can be thought of as a form of dialogue, reflection, and response which can be used both as a tool in the creative process and as a document containing tacit knowledge.

This way of looking at video documentation is also taken up by Fiona Wilkie. She proposed that watching video documentation can disclose alternative dimensions of the work (2004). She considered the meaning of the video documentation of Blast Theory's performance installation *Desert Rain* and compared it to participating in the installation. By looking at the video documentation from a framework of site specificity she treats the work through a discourse of spatial engagement, in which the work operates between differ-

ent spaces and contexts – in the case of *Desert Rain*, real (the physical installation) and virtual space (the online participants as well as the context of the Gulf War on which the work reflects). More importantly, video documentation when viewed in a new context will evoke different connotations, which as Wilkie suggests, could add other layers to the work.¹⁶ As such, it implies that Blast Theory's video documentation adds new layers of meaning to their performances, which could potentially deepen the conceptual idea in new – and perhaps unforeseen – ways.

Documentation of media art leads to a situation where diverse practices respond to a variety of needs and ideas around artistic work. This potentially allows documentation to develop as a critical space in its own right where the issues and concerns of the work are addressed through appropriate forms without necessarily becoming reproduction (Lycouris, 2000). From this perspective documentation is understood as a mode of production as well as a mode of critical interpretation, which helps to overcome the fragmented view inherent in documentation.

| 157

DOCUMENTATION FOR RECREATION

Next to their intense documentation strategies, both during the process of creating the work and in presenting the work, Blast Theory is also putting a large emphasis on archiving the gathered materials.¹⁷ As a performance group working and communicating directly with the audience, they consider the voice of the audience as a central element in their archival practice. One goal for keeping an archive is to preserve the potential and importance of live art, which is often marginalized due to the ephemeral nature of the work and, in the case of Blast Theory, technically complex, collaborative, and conceptually heterogeneous. Besides, making documentation and building an archive for them is a means to show that artistic creativity is open to everyone.

By using *documentation as process* and making specific documentation that reflects the intention, concept, and atmosphere of the live performance, *documentation as presentation*, and combining these in an archive, at first sight Blast Theory seems to be focused on future *recreation*. But what are the chances that such a technically complex work consisting of obsolete equipment could be recreated? When asking them if it would be possible to recreate the work, they replied that it would probably take a few weeks but would certainly be possible. But digging a bit deeper and asking if it would also be possible by someone else in 50 years, it became more problematic. Not only because of the obvious obsolescence of technical hardware or network dependencies, but foremost because changes in software configurations, notation, or com-

menting on version updates happened at irregular intervals, making it hard to decipher all the code and decisions involved. Similarly, one needs to know the historical context of the technology because it could have (un)willingly influenced the aesthetic and the functioning of the work. A lot of the technical issues around recreation also come down to the availability and rights-free use of the information. In the case of Blast Theory, because they work with the Mixed Reality Lab (MRL) of the University of Nottingham on the development of code, this could present future problems. Although a lot is written down in academic papers about the code and programming, this does not necessarily mean it is also freely available.

Moreover, next to the technical difficulty there is of course the performativity of the work that needs to be recreated, as Nick Tandavanitj remarks: “There is all sorts of specific learning about how you manage people in a specific situation. The front-of-house is probably well documented. But the scenography – the managing of getting people into a car without them noticing it, the way you give directions to people, the minutiae of dealing with people in those experiences – is probably not documented very well.” It is interesting to make a short detour to other disciplines like gaming or contemporary dance and music that struggle with similar problems, where a score, notation, or rules are easy to preserve but the interpretation of these becomes more difficult. In gaming, rules of the game can be kept and the game play can be recorded to a certain extent. Furthermore, because of its digital nature it is easy to capture all kinds of data about the game. But what do these recordings and saved data reveal about the types of experiences the players had? With the aid of information technology like sensors we can save more data *about* performances than we could previously, but not the performance itself. Similarly, a contemporary dance performance is a living system that continues developing, and because it is passed on through body movements it is always in a state of development. Sometimes strategies from the field of oral history or ethnographic “in-game” research (following developer’s processes or participant behaviors in games) are used to capture the participants’ experience or to shed light on the development process, the design choices that underlie the work, or the relationship between design decisions and the experience players had while interacting with the work. The idea is that this will shed light on the process and hence involve transference of knowledge about the design, process, and experience, which will help to sustain or recreate the work.¹⁸

Although Blast Theory thinks it would be possible to recreate the work, not everything is written down, annotated or documented in a way that it is easily traceable. A documentation model might help to document the work in a systematic way in order to recreate it at any future day. Of course the question of desirability should be addressed, but more importantly the question

whether and in what way such a strategy will change the work is important to take into reconsideration.

From Object Dependencies to Behaviors

Because of their complex, variable, and interactive nature, it comes as no surprise that most museums and institutes have not taken up the challenge to collect and consequently start to think of ways and methods to document interactive projects like *Uncle Roy All Around You*. But in the past decennia, some attempts have been made to see the documentation of these variable works in another light. The best known is the work by Forging the Future (FtF), formerly known as the Variable Media Network (VMN).¹⁹ With an interest in the preservation of contemporary artwork, the strategy of the VMN is very much focused on methods of documentation. The VMN proposed a strategy where artists are encouraged to define their work independently from medium so that the work can be translated once its current medium becomes obsolete. The approach is centered on the content of the work rather than its medium or physical manifestation. In addition, what they seek to concentrate on is less on the individual technical components that an artwork comprises, but rather on what one of its founders, Jon Ippolito, has coined as the “medium-independent behaviors” of the work (Depocas, Ippolito, and Jones, 2003: 48). By using the performative term “behaviors” the VMN tried to come up with a methodology that would work across mediums and therefore could still be recognized in the far future – where we might not understand the term “U-matic” (a videocassette format used in the 1970-1980s) but will still recognize the meaning of the term “installed.” Whereas traditional methods for describing an artwork consist of object dependent terminology – name of the artist(s), date of the work, medium used, the dimensions (height, width, and depth), and the collection – shifting the focus to a work’s behavior tells something about the presentation and perception of the work, such as that works can be installed, performed, reproduced, duplicated, interactive, encoded, networked, or contained. In order to distil the most desirable way for future presentations the VMN developed a questionnaire, the Variable Media Questionnaire (VMQ), to get at the core or, as Ippolito calls it, the *kernel* of the work (Depocas, Ippolito, and Jones, 2003: 47).

The questionnaire prompts questions for each inherent artwork behavior that requires preservation. However, it is not intended to be exhaustive. The VMQ is foremost a vehicle to incite questions that should be answered in order to capture artists’ desires about how to translate their work into new mediums after expiration of the work’s original medium. By bringing perspectives from

conservators and curators together with artists and if possible their technicians, programmers, and engineers the VMN approach tries to establish a better understanding of how the work should evolve and be handled over time in order to preserve its ephemeral character: “A questionnaire [stimulates] responses that will help to understand the artists’ intent. The questionnaire is not a sociological survey, but an instrument for determining how artists would like their work to be re-created in the future – if at all. [...] The results of the questionnaire, the variable media kernel, enter a multi-institutional database that enables collecting institutions to share and compare data across artworks and genres” (Depocas, Ippolito, and Jones, 2003: 47). The VMQ is an invaluable guide for conducting artist interviews, as the medium-independent line of questioning often elicits highly descriptive responses to questions about a work’s past and future incarnations.²⁰

160 |

The VMQ is very valuable as a tool for interview practices because it takes into account both the concept of the work and the context in which it evolves. It confirms the necessity to let go of traditional preservation methods that focus on the recreation of the work as it originally appeared and instead try to think of new ways to document and reinstall obsolete artworks. The VMN approach was highly praised and welcomed by both practitioners and scholars in contemporary art conservation science. Whereas the VMQ certainly enticed new ways of thinking about the preservation of variable artworks, many questions remain: Is an answered questionnaire based on artist interviews sufficient in order to understand the working of the artwork? Does it give sufficient insight into the creative and working process? Does it reflect the interaction and experience the artwork invokes, both in relation to and between the participants and the context in which it is enacted? These and other questions were taken up and further developed in new models and methods by other organizations that share the concern for the documentation practice of obsolete artworks. In order to discuss the advantages and limits of the different models I will elaborate on three different approaches that have received high acclaim over the past years mostly because of their unconventional approach and as such have been adapted and used by other organizations in various ways.

V2_: CAPTURING UNSTABLE MEDIA CONCEPTUAL MODEL

One of the first new approaches came from V2_Organisation, Institute for the Unstable Media in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. The Capturing Unstable Media Conceptual Model (CMCM) was developed in 2003 as a conceptual model for documenting and describing newly created electronic art installations, rather than recreating or preserving existing works.²¹ Notwithstanding,

it provides multiple potential applications for documenting every aspect of a design process, which could potentially influence preservation. V2_ distinguishes three phases in the development of a work that all require different documentation strategies: 1. The research phase, in which the draft of the concept for a project, the researching of required know-how, the design, and the first conceptual developments of the project take place; 2. the development phase, in which the actual hardware and software development takes place and its outcomes are tested and put together in a specific configuration or setup, and 3. the implementation phase, in which the results of research and development are implemented in a specific environment. Each of these phases is associated with different types of documentation.

More than any of the other documentation models, V2_'s perspective balances the intersections of art, science, and technology. Their strategy is to document the environment in which electronic art functions. This notion of "capturing" details about a work is considered complementary to the traditional preservation methods. V2_ reused the set of attributes, components, and behaviors of variable media, as distinguished in the VMQ. They complemented the VMQ with missing components and essential aspects that they identified as: definition of concepts; focus on several manifestations in a line of work, rather than on the reconstruction and display of a finalized artwork; all possible components of these manifestations and the interplay of these components.

| 161

NEW ART TRUST, MOMA, SFMOMA, TATE: MATTERS IN MEDIA ART

Matters in Media Art (MMA) is a multiphase project designed to provide guidelines for taking care of time-based media works of art (e.g., video, film, audio, and computer-based installations).²² The project was created in 2003 by a consortium of curators, conservators, registrars, and media technical managers from New Art Trust, MoMA, SFMOMA, and Tate. The consortium launched its first phase, on loaning time-based media works, in 2004, and its second phase, on acquiring time-based media works, in 2007. The aim is to blend traditional museum practice with new modes of operating that derive from and respond to the complex nature of media art installations.

MMA provides a practical response to the need for internationally agreed-upon standards for the handling, installation, and care of time-based media artworks. The research resulted in a template that can be used in the acquisition process of a work, which is divided in three overlapping phases: pre-acquisition, accessioning, and post-acquisition. As such it is a basic framework to prepare the artwork for long-term preservation and future installation. At the

moment MMA has entered its third phase, and is looking specifically at challenges around Internet-based art (SFMOMA with Bay Area Video Coalition, BAVC) and computer-based arts (Tate). Many organizations have used and adjusted their best practices guidelines to their specific needs.

RICHARD RINEHART: THE MEDIA ART NOTATION SYSTEM

The Media Art Notation System (MANS, 2005) is the result of research by Richard Rinehart in which he proposes a new approach to conceptualizing digital and media art forms.²³ His research is an outgrowth and continuation of two earlier projects: Archiving the Avant Garde and the Variable Media Network. Rinehart intends to inform a better understanding of media art forms and to provide a descriptive practice for preservation. MANS has three levels of implementation progressing from simple to more complex. The layers consist of the *conceptual model* of documentation, the preferred *expression format* (vocabulary) for the model (the interpretation of DIDL XML), and, its top layer, the *score*, which serves as a record of the work that is database-processable (Rinehart, 2004). The core concepts form a “broad strokes” description of the work. This broad description could be used by the artist or museum at the time the work is created or collected. Further details, alternate accounts, and audience annotations can be filled in later in the life of the work. MANS provides a framework for reflection on the logical arrangement of collected elements, which can be distributed and archived through a website simply by broad type or general categories (for example, interviews, installation views, technical details and hardware, exhibition context, other installations, and audience interviews). This way any structure can be applied to it and connections can be made through tags, keywords, or other visualization tools.

The theoretical approach was explored through issues raised in the process of creating a formal “declarative model” (alternately known as a metadata framework, notation system, or ontology) for digital and media art. Rinehart used the metaphor of the musical score because media art follows a similar composition in which the essential concept or score is more important than the instruments or hardware that are used to perform or install a piece: “As long as the essential score performed is the same, the musical work itself will be recognizable and retain its integrity” (2004: 2). The MANS score represents a media-independent logical backbone for the work that relies on the original files to provide detailed functionality and appearance. By taking the musical score as a metaphor and method, the model has “a flexible yet robust structure and incorporates the passage of time and the possibility of change” (MacDonald, 2009: 63). The conceptual idea of a score, as a fixed form yet variable

in its execution, is interesting. Using the musical score as an example is, on the other hand, also questionable because nowhere is the difference between the written score and the performance so contested as in musicology (Cook, 1999). Besides, MANS is presented as a metadata framework. As such it does not overcome the problem inherent in any text-based representational framework describing non-textual information. In other words, it is extremely difficult to describe and translate an artwork into a formal system, also (or even more so) for an artist. For example, emotions and symbolism are hard to communicate in a traditional sense and at times an artwork by intention negates such interpretation (Svenonius, 1994).

Comparing Strategies

The models of MMA and MANS allow for levels of description related to the work as a whole (in its final presentation phase) as well as more detailed descriptions of specific iterations/occurrences of a work. This immediately presents the most urgent problem, which is the emphasis on the final work – the end product. Whereas in archival literature there is a recognition that “preservation begins with creation,” these models hold on to traditional ways of dealing with objects and documents and are resistant to moving towards a more holistic approach (Waters and Garrett, 1996).²⁴ Important to note in this respect are observations by people who have conducted case studies that it is easier to document a work when it is presented. When a work is in storage it is much harder to talk about specific issues. The installation of a work facilitates the detection of problems and provides a better view on the specific decisions taken or methods used in the creation of the work.²⁵ It is for this reason that some people argue for more presentations to enhance the visibility and understanding of the way art *works* (Dekker, 2010). It could be argued that presentation leads to preservation. From this point of view the CMCM model is more interesting as it highlights the creative and production process of the work by focusing on the interaction between the work and the stakeholders. Next to a detailed description of the resources it focuses on the relationships between entities in the construction and the execution of the work. It is unfortunate that this part of the model is also the least described. For example, the complex elements of interaction are left to “well-chosen documentation.” V2_ acknowledges that more research needs to be done in this field and suggestions are made to look at appropriate models in the social sciences, where methods or standards for registering social behavior and intercommunications between humans and machines are under development. Even though the CMCM model is not intended for preservation, it provides interesting opportunities for a

form of documentation that moves beyond mere descriptive, comparative, or mapping exercises. Although attempts are made to expand and elaborate on the model, these are currently still under development.²⁶

Compared to the other systems, the models of CMCM and MMA prove to be most relevant to the context of media art because they focus on the process of production and creation (CMCM) and on the artist intentions (MMA). However, the artists' intent is not easy to distract, formulate or even comprehended either by the creator or interviewer and as such it can be a difficult and problematic strategy.²⁷ It is important to realize that an interview is always a reflection of a specific moment in time. It is never value-free and always influenced by the specific background, expertise and personality, of the interviewer and artist as well as the interaction between them (Van Saaze, Dekker, and Wijers, 2010). Nevertheless, a slow movement in this direction can be seen especially concerning contemporary artworks where the artist's involvement in conservation practice is regarded as a necessity, and where the artist becomes *the* stakeholder in the perpetuation of the work (Van Saaze, 2009: 106-111). A related phenomenon is the concept of group creation, a common practice in media art but new for many museums, conservators, and curators. This new form of working in artistic practice manifests itself through people from multiple disciplines and can lead to unstable, networked, variable, or different versions of an "end" project (that again can be influenced by the participants), which in turn has implications on collection, documentation and conservation. The notion of variable or different versions is not new to digital media, and can even be found with physical and "stable" objects or installations. For museums and galleries it is not uncommon to have exhibition copies of a work that they have acquired (Van Saaze, 2009). In other words, most media art practices deal with multiple creation practices and contexts that are uncertain. At the moment this is partly reflected in the models as the ideal state, the past and the present state, but these different parameters might not be sufficient to account for the level or need of variation that is inherent in the work. As Megan Winget suggests, a deeper understanding of the general creation behaviors and methods used by new media artists in general will augment the discussion regarding the challenges of digital art collection and preservation (2008).

Notwithstanding the high value of their theoretical underpinnings, one of the pitfalls of all the models discussed, especially those of VMQ, MANS, and CMCM, is their highly prescribed structures which, as said before, makes it difficult to implement a realistic and easily repeatable documentation project in conservation practice, especially outside the field of installation art. These findings show that in any documentation process a multilevel approach is preferred. Such a structure should emphasize the tension between the "ideal"

notion of the artwork (as a composite, theoretical idea constructed from artist statements, technical schemas, and the accumulation of many iterations) and the “real” individual experiences of the audience and/or expert members (curators, archivists, etc.) (Jones, 2007). Most of the models are established by the conventions of information classification with which they are familiar. This is not only important to realize from an ideological point of view but, on a more practical note, it means that once classifications, tags, or expressions change, so will the usability of these models. Therefore, the recreation of a work requires a thorough understanding of the context in which the information and organization about the work was made – there is a need to document the context of documentation creation, as it were. The vocabulary initially suggested by the VMN is exemplary in this respect. The third-generation VMQ that was presented at the DOCAM Summit in Montreal (March 2010) looks at artworks as ensembles of components, instead of behaviors as discussed in the earlier version, because this would be more intuitive for registrars, conservators, and other arts specialists. As Ippolito explained:

| 165

The purpose is to understand the key elements of a work that are critical to its function, such as source code or media display. Acknowledging the relational character of much contemporary art, these parts extend beyond hardware to include environments, user interactions, motivating ideas, and external references. Structuring the Questionnaire in this way makes it easier to compare different artworks created with similar parts (email to the author, February 22, 2010).

The VMN questionnaire remains a valuable tool for discussing the work and discovering the core intentions, that is, the most important parts of a work. Even though the VMN approach to documentation and its emphasis on behavioral elements might not prove successful, it certainly enticed new ways of thinking about the preservation of an artwork. More specifically it confirmed the necessity to let go of traditional preservation methods that focused on the recreation of the work regardless of the artists’ intent, and think of new ways to document obsolete artworks. Nevertheless, questions remain. For example, is a written questionnaire sufficient in order to understand the experience the artwork invoked? And in the case of many time-based artworks, and especially of media art, where the actual experience of the work by its audience is regarded as crucial, can documentation also be a potential for actual experience? A description and photo of a work can give an understanding of the piece, but these are still far removed from actually experiencing the work.

Piotr Adameczyk explored the working of the VMQ and CMCM for describing human-computer interaction in new media installations (2008). His analy-

sis showed that the models work on the level of documentation or accession in a museum context, but that they often fail when recounting the participatory context. Where Adamczyk suggests using human computer interaction (HCI) ethnographic methods, others are more inclined to using strategies from the field of oral history (Muller, 2010). The two strategies meet in the belief that accounts from participants' experiences "would offer rich and varied portraits of how the artworks existed in experience and would necessarily widen our understanding of the relationship of media art to its social and cultural context" (Muller, 2010: 6.1). The attention to audience experience and contextual information is as of yet not provided in any of the models.²⁸

Already it can be concluded that the existing models are not ideal when dealing with technical specifications that are connected to the experience of the work, nor do they provide much information about the experience as such. But are these elements more visible in, or can they be extracted from, artists' documentation?

166 |

Uncle Roy All Around You in a Model

Uncle Roy All Around You is a participatory multiplayer, multilayered (combining virtual and real worlds) game and, as the title suggests, the participants' surroundings play an important role. The conceptual idea, the technical interface, and the game play and its locations are defined, but they are all susceptible to change. With so many changing parameters it is no surprise that the participants also experience the working of GPS, WiFi, and the interfaces in very different ways. As Steve Benford, one of the technical collaborators in Blast Theory's projects, noted: "Our study reveals the diverse ways in which online players experienced the uncertainties inherent in GPS and WiFi, including being mostly unaware of them, but sometimes seeing them as problems, or treating them as a designed feature of the game, and even occasionally exploiting them within gameplay" (2006). It is precisely such subtle differences that are not taken into account in the previously described models, and they are also hard to pinpoint in an interview.

Moreover, Blast Theory used these circumstances as tactics and elements in the game as well; anticipating but never knowing for sure when, for example, technical failures would occur and an according action should be taken. Therefore such (technical) failures were used to enhance the dramatic narrative of the story. This did not mean, however, that the actual occurrences were planned. Although the game play was extensively and carefully orchestrated, there were many moments of uncertainty and these were hard to pin down. Instead of discarding them, the limitations of the technology became inte-

gral elements in the performativity of the work. In other words, the technical dependencies of the art form emphasize the meaning and the experience of the work. This ambiguity and uncertainty in the work do not have a place in models like CMCM or questionnaires like VMQ. This became apparent when asking Blast Theory if the GPS interface system could be replaced in the future by other technology (one of the key questions in the VMQ); the answer was simply yes. However, the discussions about their working process, their way of creating documents, and their attitude towards technology showed that the working of the technology, its current failures, and the inherent uncertainties, had influenced both the concept and the performativity of the work and, as such, were integral when experiencing the work. Replacing the technology at any future time may thus prove to be problematic at the experiential and conceptual levels of the work.

These examples already show that, for some specific but integral information, the models as described do not suffice. One of the main problems is that the documentation models are often (with the exception of CMCM) extracted from earlier dominant discourses (paintings, sculpture) and mapped onto a marginalized one (media art, performance, games), imposing a model according to which meaning is reproduced through the end result but is not emerging from the interaction of multiple agencies that create the experience.²⁹ Especially projects like *Uncle Roy* need a multilayered approach that takes into account relationships between objects in the construction and the execution of the work as well as provides insight into participants' interaction and experience. In other words: the documentation of such a work requires insight into the conceptual, creative, and working process from a technical, relational, and experiential perspective. All these play important roles in what makes the artwork and are not external to the artwork. In this respect, Jeroen van Mastrigt (2009) hints at the conservation of "an ecosystem instead of an object," and a similar remark was made by Geoffrey Bowker.³⁰ A framework of a documentation model for media art should therefore address the creative process, reflect the work's variability, relate to the context, and take into account the participants' experience.

Looking into the Future: Media Art in a Museum Collection

Suzanne Briet stated: "the forms that documentary work assumes are as numerous as the needs from which they are born," and, coming to the end of this chapter, this statement is as strong as ever (2006: 36). It is important to know the meaning and value of documents and documentation, but it is just as important to know their relationship, the context, and, in addition to

Briet, the process of their creation. Analysis of artists' documentation methods and comparing these to the information that is given or asked for in traditional museum documentation models showed that specific and inherent qualities of media artwork are not taken into account in the models up until now. Closer analysis of Blast Theory's creative processes indicated that crucial information on details of the project and the experience it yielded, most importantly the behavior of the technology and the influence this had on the performativity of the work, might get lost when using standard questionnaires or applying emulation methods that transfer the game play to new platforms. It is clear that multimedia artworks are technically complex, not only in their final presentation but also in their production phase. For a recreation of the work it is therefore important to understand the technical choices that were made in the context of the time they were made (see also Lurk and Enge, 2010, and Winget, 2008). As such, it is important to recognize that meaning is often constituted *through* an object and is not solely held *within* the object (Clavir, 2002). This means that it is also important to allow for media-archaeological research when recreating a multimedia artwork.

Taking into account what I have termed *documentation as process* will yield a better understanding of the inherent qualities of the work. It is important to be aware of decisions and their consequences that are made in the development of the work and accurately describe or record them. Theoretically, it is possible to recreate complex media artworks like *Uncle Roy All Around You*, but the level of success would increase when artists' strategies are integrated into museum practices or by adapting existing models by giving more attention to the creative process. But would it be possible for *Uncle Roy* to end up in a museum collection? This is of course a difficult question with multiple entries, but aside from the issue of money or artistic value, what would be needed of the museum staff to conserve the work? What are the possible implications for them to care for and recreate the work at any time in the future? But, even more importantly: would it be desirable at all? Would not the documentation that is gathered, made, and collected communicate more about a work, and how it is experienced, than its physical manifestation? Referring to the documentation videos by Blast Theory I argued for an expanded understanding of *documentation as presentation*. This treats video documentation not merely as a way to capture live events, but also as a form of dialogue, response, and reflection. Furthermore, when brought into new presentation contexts, documentation has the potential to deepen the conceptual idea in new ways, adding new layers to the work. In other words, documentation becomes a critical space in its own right, opening the prospect to elaborate on the original work.

It seems an obvious statement: documentation might guide the decision-making process in conservation, but the gaps or blind spots will influence the

work. In order to make the most of these, more emphasis should go to the roles and responsibilities of curators and conservators. In this article I argued that a first step would be to recognize the need for an extended conception of documentation, distinguishing different types of documentation, and phasing their role and function in the dynamic, performative practice of contemporary media art. Whereas more and more collaborative approaches are undertaken to develop documentation models, the practical implementation of the work often remains with individual curators or conservators. A more collaborative practice of knowledge production and documentation may overcome this situation, including also artists, information scientists, and programmers. This will also lead to a better understanding of the work and could potentially lead to opportunities for creating new versions, thus building, elaborating, and commenting on a previous state. If this approach would be followed it not only opens new ways of thinking about what conservation means but it can entice new ways of dealing with the structure and the function of the museum (see Kraemer, 2007, and Van Mastrigt, 2009). A museum could move from being a custodian of “dead objects” to a “living space” where presentation, preservation, discussion, and active exploration go hand in hand.

6.2 CASE STUDY: *NO GHOST JUST A SHELL* BY PIERRE HUYGHE, PHILIPPE PARRENO, AND MANY OTHERS

Vivian van Saaze

Introduction

No Ghost Just a Shell, a seminal project initiated by French-based artists Philippe Parreno and Pierre Huyghe and acquired by the Van Abbemuseum Eindhoven (NL) in 2002, consists of more than 25 artworks by over a dozen artists and artist groups, each work evolving around the virtual character of “Annlee.” The history of *No Ghost Just a Shell* goes back to 1999 when Philippe Parreno and Pierre Huyghe decided to buy a virtual Manga character (developed for the cartoon industry), modeled the image in 3-D, gave it a name (Annlee), a voice, and started off with making two short real-time animation films on the character (see Fig. 6.3 in color section). Between 1999 and 2002 they shared the figure with other artists and artist groups, inviting them to give Annlee a life by creating artworks using the figure as a point of departure. From 1999 onwards the figure of Annlee appeared in many different places and eventually accumulated into an exhibition in Zurich (entitled *No Ghost Just a Shell*), which later traveled to San Francisco and Cambridge.³¹ There were paintings (by Henri Barande and Richard Phillips), videos (by, for instance, Liam Gillick, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, François Curlet, and Melik Ohanian), toys for Annlee (Angela Bulloch and Imke Wagener), wallpaper and posters (M/M Paris), music (Anna-Léna Vaney), a magazine (Lily Fleury) and even a coffin for Annlee by Joe Scanlan.

In order to prevent other artists from using the image, in 2002 Parreno and Huyghe hired a property lawyer to draw up a contract transferring the copyrights of Annlee back to her imaginary character. The wish was “to protect Annlee” and “to ensure that the image of Annlee will never appear beyond the existing representations” (Huyghe and Parreno, 2003: 25). On 4 December 2002 at 9:30 pm, the vanishing of Annlee was celebrated by means of a staged fireworks display during the inaugural night of Art Basel Miami Beach. As curator and author Maria Lind notes: “That was the end of this particular collaboration” (Lind, 2007: 15). By that time, however, the Van Abbenmuseum was already in the process of acquiring *No Ghost Just a Shell* for its collection. Right from the start, *No Ghost Just a Shell* was depicted as a “special purchase” and a breakthrough in collection activities; instead of an individual object, an entire exhibition was being acquired.

This case study description will focus on the issue of collaboration and the

problem of multiple authors in relation to the process of documentation and archiving in a museum context.³² Since the preset entry descriptions of many existing digital collection management systems do not leave much room for variability, artworks produced by multiple contributors are in danger of being reduced into fixed categories such as: single date, single artist, and single dimensions. How then to capture the hybrid character of *No Ghost Just a Shell*? Before going into the case study, let us first take a closer look at the increasingly popular phenomena of multiple authorship in art production, also known as “collaboration art.”

Multiple Authorship

No Ghost Just a Shell is arguably one of the most noted and well-known examples of collective practices in art in recent years. Although cooperation and collaboration in art production has happened for many years, since the 1990s, collaboration as a conscious strategy and an intentional mode of production has become increasingly popular in artistic work.³³ The modes of – and reasons for – collaboration are diverse and vary from a pragmatic choice or necessity (for example: the artwork can only be produced by a number of people because its making requires specific, often technological, know-how) to a form of activism (for example: challenging the art market and questioning the common notion of authorship or art as the product of an individual genius) and simple curiosity (as the outcome of a collaborative effort will always be unpredictable). The current surge in collaborative art projects is related to an increased usage of digital media in the arts and can be understood, for example, as an offspring of the “new media critique” of the 1990s that strongly argued for new production methods based on sharing, cooperation, common ownership and open source structures.³⁴ Although the Annlee project consists of a multitude of art forms (such as video works, paintings, a book, installations, and objects), the story of its inception and how it was set up encompasses many features of digital media and media art: multiple contributors, decentralization, networking capacities, open source structure, variability, versioning, and so on.

The initiating and coordinating artists, Huyghe and Parreno, have not been very outspoken about the specific nature of the collaboration, nor have they elaborated on the selection criteria for inviting artists and other contributors. Rather than really working closely together on a single product, each artist produced an independent artwork starting from a shared point of departure: the Annlee figure. Maria Lind describes the process as follows: “The participants shaped episodes which could function as independent art works, but

which together constructed not only a collaborative art project and exhibition but also a new order of identity. Into the bargain, a temporary community of 17 persons was created” (Lind, 2007: 15).³⁵

There was never a prefixed list; friends and other artists seemed to be invited in a more or less haphazard way. In an interview, Huyghe refers to the book *Esthétique relationnelle* (1998) by French philosopher and curator Nicolas Bourriaud as being “instrumental to setting up this group of artists.” Huyghe: “In a certain way, Nicolas’s book was like the production of a new scenario; in the manner I discuss this in my own practice. His book and his words provided a linkage between various artists and people” (2003: 100-110).

Others such as Van der Beek describe the project as creating its own network with connections in different social and artistic spheres (2003: 42). In a similar fashion, Hal Foster labeled *No Ghost Just a Shell* as “archival art” in a special issue of *October*. He explains: “...much archival art does appear to ramify like a weed or ‘rhizome’” (Foster, 2004: 6). In interviews, the initiating artists also refer to this rhizome-like structure that grows organically, appearing and disappearing depending on the connections that it is able to make. Huyghe: “It is less a question of ‘process,’ which is too linear, but of a vibrating temporality” (Huyghe quoted in Baker, 2004: 88). This way of working can be said to be exemplary for both Philippe Parreno and Pierre Huyghe. Rather than being studio bound and creating fixed and finished art objects, their projects develop in diverse settings and often in close interaction with other projects and people. It starts with a plan, but the plan, as they say, may change along the way.

Acquisition, Registration, Documentation

With the acquisition of *No Ghost Just a Shell*, the Van Abbemuseum has intentionally confronted itself with problems that are typical for many of today’s collaborative (time-based or media) artworks. The acquisition of an exhibition undermines the traditional notion of the artwork as a single, autonomous product of an individual artist. First of all, unlike a more straightforward transaction involving the buying or selling of an art object, this acquisition took the Van Abbemuseum’s director, the curator of exhibitions, and other museum staff members at least one year to agree with the artists and their dealers as to which works could and should be purchased, as well as to sort out the required legal apparatus of the project.³⁶ The artists Huyghe and Parreno acted as intermediaries between the museum and all individual artists who had contributed to the project. Each Annlee work had to be purchased separately from the relevant artist or gallery because there was no specifically developed economic

system within which the works had been produced. However, the curator of exhibitions stressed the conceptual necessity of considering the acquisition as an *exhibition*: as a whole rather than a collection of independent artworks. Thus, rather than providing all individual objects with an inventory number, as common practice would have it, he wanted the exhibition to become registered under one inventory number.³⁷

Registration of the acquisition under one single inventory number, however, would cause several administrative problems due to the collection management system used by the museum. The existing protocols stipulate that when individual artworks are not registered in the museum database system, they are administratively not visible and simply do not exist in terms of collection management. If, in other words, the exhibition *No Ghost Just a Shell* would have received a single inventory number, there is a danger that each individual Annlee artwork and the contributors would be overlooked or simply be lost because they are not registered. Moreover, if artworks are not registered, they might not be insured, for example, and they may end up existing outside all museum protocols, which are developed for single objects.

| 173

On the other hand, it was also problematic if each Annlee work was recorded as an individual entry in the system: how could its relationship to *No Ghost Just a Shell* remain visible? The curator of collections was thus confronted with a problem stemming from the limitations of the museum's management system, The Museum System (TMS). TMS is a standardized commercial collection management system developed by Gallery Systems and is used by many museums. The system is mainly developed for more traditional, stable works such as paintings and sculptures and thus represents the single artist, single object paradigm. As such, it leaves little room for variability and provides no possibility to address multiple authors or specific interactions.³⁸

In order for *No Ghost Just a Shell* to be accounted for as an acquisition, it needed to be fragmented into single objects or registered under one entry. The museum was thus left with two choices: *No Ghost Just a Shell* was either reduced to being considered as one artwork (with the danger of losing sight of the individual artworks), or all artworks had to be registered separately (running the risk of the relationships between the individual artworks and their connection to the exhibition being lost). Either way, crucial relationships would be lost. In the end, this administrative problem was solved by creating special "work sets" in TMS that created a link between individual Annlee works while also allowing the person entering the data to designate one inventory number to the project as a whole.³⁹

In addition to the information stored in TMS, the museum also houses an extensive paper archive, and for each individual Annlee work, there is also a paper documentation file. In these paper files, the connection between the

individual work and *No Ghost Just a Shell* is demonstrated by a copy of the acquisition proposal document stating that the artwork belongs to the *No Ghost Just a Shell* project. Due to the complex history and hybrid character of the project, much time was spent on producing documentation on the project as a whole and the exhibition history of each individual artwork.⁴⁰ Moreover, because installation guidelines for the works were lacking, each individual artist had to be consulted by the museum so as to reach agreements on how the individual works and the project could be displayed in the future. The collaborative nature of the project and the lack of overall control after its acquisition did not make things easier for the museum. As the director of the Van Abbemuseum notes: “There are certain conditions which they have agreed to but then those conditions change depending on what moment and who you are talking to.”⁴¹

In Conclusion: Continuous Collaboration

Collaborative art projects like *No Ghost Just a Shell* challenge the acquisition of such works for a museum collection in various ways. *No Ghost Just a Shell* is both an exhibition and a set of individual artworks. Registering the acquisition into a commonly used collection management system, however, meant working around the pre-set categories of single artist, single artwork and single date. These and other limitations of standardized collection management systems and documentation models have been subject to much discussion in contemporary art museums and have led to the development of several alternative models and systems especially designed for those categories of art that fall outside of more traditional art forms.⁴² Arguing from the position of new media, curator and researcher Jon Ippolito advocates a more differentiated and precise tagging system that would capture the variability of artworks and would allow for captions and wall labels to do so, too. As collaborations are the rule rather than the exception for new media art, Ippolito (2008) advocates new documentation strategies that are designed to document and even encourage “expandable” and changing authorship functions.⁴³ In the wake of the development of these new models, existing systems such as TMS are also encouraged to adapt to the needs of non-traditional artworks. In terms of collaborative art projects, this would mean acknowledging the various specific relationships and interactions between artworks and their contributors.

In addition to the problem of registration and documentation, such collaborative projects also ask for a collaborative attitude from their collectors. Although the particular collaboration between the artists may have ended, the collaborative aspect of the project was extended to the museum; by acquiring

No Ghost Just a Shell, the Van Abbemuseum needed to continue collaborating with the individual artists, their galleries, and former exhibition places. The acquisition of *No Ghost Just a Shell* transforms the museum's role: rather than an "end point," the museum becomes a collaborator as well. Moreover, in 2007, private collector Rosa de la Cruz donated another version of *No Ghost Just a Shell* to the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) in North Miami and Tate Modern in London. The Van Abbemuseum is now exploring how these two different versions of *No Ghost Just a Shell* relate to each other and what collaboration between the different museums could mean. Arguably, to ensure the perpetuation of *No Ghost Just a Shell* and its vibrant and hybrid character, it is precisely this collaborative aspect that the museum will need to endorse.

6.3 THE ARTIST'S INTERVIEW AS A TOOL FOR DOCUMENTING AND RECREATING A COMPLEX INSTALLATION: THE EXAMPLE OF *MBUBE*, AN AUDIO-INSTALLATION BY ROBERTO CUOGHI IN THE MUSEO DEL NOVECENTO, MILAN

Iolanda Ratti

Introduction

Milan's Museo Del Novecento (the Museum of the 20th Century) houses a collection of over 4,000 works that document the development of Italian art from the historical avant-garde movements to the 1980s. This new museum of contemporary art also features a group of more recent works acquired by the City of Milan that involve the use of new media.

Having been closed to the public over the past few years has allowed the museum to dedicate itself to a careful study of its collections. It conducted several experimental restorations and established a collaboration with the History of Art Techniques Department of the University of Milan. The aim of the synergy, by now in its concluding phase, was to support a number of dissertations focused on one or two of the living artists featured in the museum's collection, either with a single artwork or with a small set of works. Students were first expected to conduct general research on the thematics of the chosen artist and on the techniques and materials used in the scope of his/her production, along with a more detailed study of the work(s) featured in the museum's collection. Next, students conducted a technical analysis of the artwork(s), with the support of the museum curator and of a restorer. The intended objectives of this stage were to gain a precise sense of the methods of production of the work and of its material and theoretical peculiarities, and to define the potential conservation problems it might pose, spanning from the inherent frailness of its materials to the installation criteria to adopt in future exhibits. In the final stage of their research the Ph.D. students were asked to measure their analysis of the chosen work against the artist's own perspective of it, by means of an interview. The goal was to further define the artist's aesthetical and technical approach and to shed light on his or her position regarding the work's future and its conservation.

Interviews were carried out following a format developed in collaboration with Professor Giuseppe Basile of ICR (the Higher Institute of Conservation and Restoration) and featured two parts. The first part was centered on collecting information about the techniques the artist used in his/her creative process, his/her thoughts regarding conservation, and his/her stance regard-

ing the role of the public in the fruition of his/her artwork. The second part approached the same themes, but through a discussion of the specific work(s) housed in the museum.

The interview format was applied for the first time in 2006, on occasion of the publication of Marina Pugliese's 2006 book *Tecnica mista. Materiali e procedimenti dell'arte del XX secolo* [*Mixed Technique. Materials and Procedures of Art of the 20th Century*]. Specifically, it was used to study two installations featuring audiovisual elements: *Mbube* (2005), an audio installation by Roberto Cuoghi, and *San Siro* (2000), a video projection by Grazia Toderi. I will here treat the first, briefly describing the work and then presenting an extract of the interview with the artist, which is particularly interesting since the work was reinstalled in the 2008 *Electronic Lounge* exhibit, allowing to test the interview's effectiveness and define its limits and problem areas.

| 177

Roberto Cuoghi, *Mbube* (2005), Audio Installation

Roberto Cuoghi (born in Modena in 1973) has made a name for himself as one of the most interesting young artists on the Italian scene since the mid-1990s, taking part in important exhibits such as the Venice Biennale and the Berlin Biennale.

Cuoghi created *Mbube*, his first sound installation, in 2005, exhibiting it first at the Rivoli Castle of Turin's first Triennale and later that year also at the CAC in Vilnius. That same year, thanks to a generous donation by the collector David Halevim, the work then became part of the City of Milan's collections. The installation was then exhibited again in 2008 in the scope of *Electronic Lounge* in the Exhibair space of Milan's Malpensa airport. The installation consists of the playing of the artist's cover of the song *Mbube*, a 1939 piece composed by the South African musician Solomon Linda made famous by the Western re-make entitled "The Lion Sleeps Tonight."

The creative process consisted in stratifying several layers of sound material, using different instruments and recording a separate track for each one based on the tune of *Mbube*. The instruments used, none of which require knowing how to read music in order to be played, included: the lotus flute, the Budrio ocarina, claves, the jingling Johnny, the vibraslap, the güiro, the djembe drum, the tambourine, the cuckoo call, the balafon, the cabasa, different other bird calls, nut shells, and various shakers.

Cuoghi first recorded each instrument on a MAC G5 pc using an AKG/Behringer UB 802 condenser microphone and then mixed the tracks using the Cubase SE software. The song was created solely by the artist, who only sporadically consulted online forums of musicians and IT experts.

The interview was fundamental for understanding how the artist works and how he reacts to the materials chosen, but also for determining the aesthetic value of the installation in view of its future re-exhibition, a necessary operation given the work's inclusion in a permanent collection (see Fig. 6.4 in color section). The three exhibits of the installation are quite different. The interview with the artist allowed to define the audio aspect as the only truly “essential” element of the work from a conservation point of view, while allowing to set specific, though flexible, diffusion criteria for environments that are (and always will be) necessarily different.

Interview Extract (Milan, 26 May 2006, the Artist's Studio)

We here report a very brief extract of the interview, specifically the answers that define the artist's approach to conservation and the work under review.

178 |

1. What is your take on the conservation of your works? Do you accept the idea that they will age naturally? When do you think intervention becomes necessary?

I don't really know what destiny the things I'm doing will have. Aging ceases to be acceptable only when the work begins to be objectively compromised. Intervening becomes necessary when the work's "functioning" starts to be compromised.

2. What does it mean to speak of conservation referring to new multimedia technologies? What role do you think that video and sound art, both analogue and digital, will play in relation to the rapid changes in software and technical support? In your opinion, what are the most efficient methods to conserve and archive video and audio material?

It is software that affords the most concrete possibility to recreate a work's original conditions at any given time: so I'm not pessimistic about it. On the other hand, today we can play Pac-Man on a last generation laptop using a 25-year-old software program, thus reproducing a "condition" in the system that has to run it. There are now software "packages" that utilize portions of MS-DOS to run obsolete programs.

3. Do you think that emulating a 25-year-old software program in order to read an original work, instead of translating the work itself into a more recent format, plays a role in maintaining its quality and “uniqueness”?

Not exactly. If a work is digital in nature its quality isn't compromised by translation into another format, because it's just a matter of number sequences. Besides, I don't think we can speak of uniqueness in the digital era. Digitizing a video captured on film – now that is a real change of support. But works that are born-digital simply require an operation of transcription. I find the signing of CDs already pretty grotesque ...

4. Are there preliminary studies of *Mbube*? Are there other versions of the work?

There are tests, slightly different versions, without some of the instruments – for instance, there are ones where the shaker plays a lesser role. They're not really other versions, they're trials. The only one that gets close to being an alternative version is the first trial, put together the year before, so two years ago. It has more or less the same structure, but is performed entirely with an electronic keyboard.

| 179

5. Are there different copies of your work? And if so, where are they? How do you protect yourself from the production of replicas and fakes?

The work was purchased first by the Rivoli Castle and then by the Halevim Collection (which then donated it to the Museum). There are officially five copies of it, by which I mean five physically distinct CDs, each "signed and numbered": the Rivoli one, the Halevim, and the others of the De Carlo Gallery.

6. How should this work be exhibited? Do its nature and identity change, depending on its spatial context?

The work should be exhibited using professional amplifying material and ensuring a rather sustained reproduction volume, so as not to seem background sound. My only worry regards the acoustic aspect. The work's identity is compromised more by poor volume than by the type of spatial context it's in. In Turin, where it was on exhibit, the music played in loop, but with at least two minutes of pause between one run and the other. They set up two huge speakers, like the ones used in concerts, in the corridor of the long side of Rivoli Castle. They played it at high volume in a space with nothing around – there was nothing in the range of twelve per seven meters, absolutely empty. Instead when they exhibited at the CAC in Vilnius they used the Center's system of loudspeakers. But at the end this produced a chaotic effect, because of course we're talking about a home recording so sound that is not clean at all. This means that when installing the piece it's extremely important to bear in mind that this is

not a CD produced by a record label. Another thing that needs to be kept under control is the boom effect, for instance through the use of absorbing panels. It really doesn't make a difference if the amplifying system is hidden or not. A method I use to see if the volume is high enough is standing in front of the amplifiers and checking if the low-pitched notes boom in my chest.

7. At what distance from other works should this work be placed?

Given the reproduction volume required, it's best to invert the question: at what distance from this work should other works be placed? Ideally the work should be treated as a solid body, so the song should be allowed to fill empty space without the fear of it being empty.

In conclusion, this interview excerpt informs us on the standpoint of the artist on preferred manners to exhibit *Mbube* and also suggests guidelines for its preservation. In only a few statements, Roberto Cuoghi has provided, for instance, information on the creation of the work and on his conscious choice to make a home recording rather than a professional one. Therefore, it is crucial to document this feature of the work in order to respect its nature and its peculiarity as a work of art in the first instance and as a sound recording at a second instance.

6.4 MAXXI PILOT TESTS REGARDING THE DOCUMENTATION OF INSTALLATION ART

Alessandra Barbuto and Laura Barreca

Guidelines for the Documentation of the MAXXI Collection

Cesare Brandi's 1963 definition of "preventative restoration" (Brandi, 1994: 7 and 54) is highly relevant for activities associated with the conservation of works of contemporary art in museum collections:

[...] preventative restoration is to be understood as any action aimed at anticipating the necessity of an intervention of restoration, making preventative restoration no less important than effective restoration. [...] It is clear, at this point, that to no lesser a degree in preventative restoration results, discoveries, and scientific interventions reference fields that interest the subsistence of the work of art: from research into lighting and its effects on the choice of light sources, as well as heat, humidity, vibrations, air conditioning systems, packaging, hanging and disinfection (33-34).

| 181

Because the works in the collection of a museum of contemporary art like MAXXI Rome belong to different linguistic and technical typologies such as complex installations, works in progress, performance events, works of net art, video art, ephemeral or immaterial works, or process art, it is fundamental to operate from the perspective of preventative restoration, with the aim of anticipating all possible risks resulting from the perishable or variable nature of these works. This involves processes of constant monitoring, including the control of the general conditions of exhibition (lighting, the use of barriers or separations), temperature and humidity conditions, both in exhibition spaces and storage areas, methods of storing works of art,⁴⁴ and the proper choices to be made in the event of works on loan.

During recent years, MAXXI's research activities have focused on current international trends, in parallel with a critical investigation of Brandi's theory and its possible applications to the specific problems and terminologies of contemporary art. The practices of documentation consider the radical changes that have affected contemporary aesthetics and the new identity of the work of art in instances where it is no longer a unique piece created by an artist but a process of cultural participation involving the public, the work itself, and the museum. The interpretation of the work of art as an *idea*, and not only as

a physical object, is now a trend that is broadly confirmed in contemporary artistic practices. This condition has manifested itself over the course of the 20th century, with the opposition of two different ideological positions: the intentionalists and the anti-intentionalists, two attitudes described by Steven Dykstra (1996) as the primary axes of debate regarding the conservation of contemporary art.

Dykstra stresses the importance of the artist's intentions and the method of interpreting the function of material (or support) in relation to the conservation of the work of art (1996: 204). The artist's intention is defined as the control exercised over a specific form, and becomes fundamental not only to the cultural meaning inherent to the work of art, but also to the correct interpretation of its functions. At present, a number of international museums consider the artist's intent as the guiding principle for the documentation of contemporary artworks (Hummelen, 2005: 24). This is achieved by acquiring information about the artist and the work such as letters, interviews, notes, annotated texts, invitations, catalogues, preparatory sketches, as well as any information relative to materials and techniques of realization, all part of the identification of those aspects essential to and coherent with the original aesthetic and historic meaning of the work, without which future presentations of the work risk becoming a discretionary act made by the curator or the museum's conservator.

The documentation of a complex artwork includes the direct involvement of the artist and requires information related to the "existential" elements of the work. Of the most suitable instruments, the video interview represents an optimum method for tracing the conceptual identity of the work, focusing on problems of conservation, creating dialogue between the museum, and the direct testimonial offered by the artist. Since 2002, the International Network for the Conservation of Contemporary Art (INCCA) has been working on the creation of a database of documents and information gathered by museums and institutions around the world.⁴⁵ Within this methodological framework of documentation, MAXXI has focused part of its research on the works in its permanent collection, in particular on methods of re-creating works of art, analyzing the process of conservation through the relationship between the museum's conservator and curator, and the way in which these professional figures interact with the documentation of the works – whether it be with the artist or in his or her absence. Another fundamental line of research recently initiated by the museum focuses on those activities of documentation propaedeutic or parallel to temporary exhibitions, and the analysis of conservation practices performed on a daily basis by its restorers.

Methodologies and Tools of Documentation

The aspect that, more than any other, distinguishes the conservation of contemporary art from that of the past is our coexistence with the author. However, this aspect does not eliminate problems of conservation; in many cases it actually complicates them. The collaboration between the artist and the museum is the starting point of the process of documentation, but sometimes the conservation choices taken by the museum may not coincide with the expectations of the artist. In fact, only in ideal cases does the artist, aware of issues of conservation, collaborate by sharing with the museum his/her intentions and indications about how to show, present, conserve, and maintain the work of art. Notwithstanding that documentation has become widespread practice, many artists are not available, or appear disinterested in providing fundamental and coherent information over a longer period of time. Vice versa, it can happen that the artist (or his/her studio or heirs, above all in the years immediately following his/her death) is overly present, pretending to act autonomously, or to rework the work acquired by the museum, as if it were still entirely within his/her domain.⁴⁶ Finally, it may also happen that the involvement of the artist in a conservation problem leads to requests by the artist to make substantial changes to the work that extend beyond the restorer's domain into the curatorial one. Working in between these different attitudes, it is always useful for the restorer to evaluate all available information with a critical spirit, attempting as much as possible to cross reference all data in the museum's collections.

| 183

The corpus of data, information, and declarations regarding the meaning of the work gathered directly from the artist represents the first nucleus of documentation for the works of new media art in the MAXXI collection.⁴⁷ The methodology of documentation defined by the museum during recent years (through participation in a pilot project promoted by the MAXXI, in cooperation with other Italian museum institutions, and through the promotion of interdisciplinary research groups⁴⁸) includes the compilation of a "general chart" that brings together a wealth of information about each single work: a brief introduction to the artist and notes on his/her work; historic dates related to the work; information, photographs, projects, and publications about each previous exhibition, even prior to its acquisition as part of the museum's collection. The chart also archives material data: the numbering and cataloging of each single part relative to the analysis of the single components of the work (in the case of complex installations, each of the various parts is listed and measured) and the typology of packaging and labeling. The technical charts related to the exhibition of the work, provided at the moment of acquisition from the gallery or artist, are united with all of the material produced during the planning of its exhibition in the museum: photographs during installa-

tion/exhibition, sketches, tests, samples. In some cases, especially for complex or environmental installations, it is necessary to commission an architectural survey and 3-D images of the work installed in the museum. When the work is removed at the end of a show, existing documentation is integrated by a condition report, used to list the detailed conditions of the work, from the moment of opening its packing crate(s), and its behavior during the period of display. This approach is particularly suitable for works with variable supports. This type of chart also contains indications related to improvements to the conditions of the work to be observed during storage and eventual details or measures to be employed in the event of shipping or loans.⁴⁹

An exceptional case of documentation emerges when the museum commissions a site-specific installation from an artist. In this case it is possible to follow the creative iteration of the work, recording the ideas that, for various reasons, were not realized, and possibilities that were not tested. It is clear that, with respect to the vast and rich documentation that can be collected in this case, one must make a selection: some of the material gathered, if left unexplained, may be misleading in the future, precisely because it relates to working hypotheses that, for one reason or another, were abandoned by the artist during the development of the work in favor of others that were effectively realized. So here, too, it is fundamental to interview the artist, establishing the specific moment of choices, practices of conservation, and possible variations that can be made during future presentations of the piece.

184 |

Case Study 1: The Documentation of an Environmental Installation: Alfredo Jaar, *Infinite Cell* (2004)⁵⁰

Acquired and exhibited on the occasion of MAXXI's inaugural exhibition, *Infinite Cell* is an architectural space constructed inside the museum. Alfredo Jaar (Santiago, Chile, 1956), a trained architect, was strongly affected by the architectural space of the museum and carefully considered the position of the work inside Zaha Hadid's building.

The piece is an exact reconstruction of the dimensions of the cell in which Antonio Gramsci was imprisoned for 20 years. A steel grate, with a single door, separates an interior from an exterior space. The space inside the cell, illuminated exclusively by a window that emits light, is infinitely multiplied by two mirror-clad walls on the short sides of the rectangular cell. On a wall near the cell, five ink drawings on parchment entitled *Gramsci* represent details of this intellectual and political thinker's face, while the silkscreen *20 anni 4 mesi 5 giorni* presents the exact number of days Gramsci spent in prison.⁵¹

The interview with the artist clarified a number of points regarding the

choices behind the construction of the cell and indications on how to position the work in space, together with suggestions related to its conservation during the exhibition and expectations associated with the interaction between the work and the public. Jaar also declared to have carefully considered and selected the colors of the exterior walls and the interior ceiling and pavement, as well as the texture of the material that clads the exterior of the cell; in his view, these elements must constitute a clear separation from the architectural finishes inside MAXXI. Furthermore, the artist described his expectations for a powerful interaction with the public, which is invited to experience the work by entering the cell through the door, such that the infinite physical reflection of the body in space alludes simultaneously to Gramsci's thoughts, rooted in the past and projected into the future.

This work is the object of a pilot project of interviews involving those responsible for choices related to its exhibition and maintenance: the director of the museum, the exhibition curator, the restorer/conservator, and the general public. A comparison of the different answers provided will eventually allow for the establishment of guidelines for the future presentations of the work.

| 185

Additionally, all documentation gathered during the exhibition is currently being archived: plans, sketches, project drawings, the list of wall colors, and an architectural survey of the space. Given that the interior of the cell contains no objects, 3-D images were considered superfluous. After being removed, a number of material elements will be maintained and stored by the museum: most likely, for reasons related exclusively to the possible reuse of materials in the event of future presentations of the work, these elements are the mirrors, prison bars, and the window. The artist does not confer a value of originality upon the materials utilized; in fact, the work was acquired by the museum in the form of a project, meaning that once the installation is taken down, the work exists only as documentation that allows the project to be reconstructed for future exhibitions.

Case Study 2: The Conservation of a Project in Progress: Bruna Esposito, *e così sia...* (2000)⁵²

Ten years after the acquisition of the work *e così sia...* (2000) by Bruna Esposito (Rome, 1960), winner of the *Premio per la Giovane Arte Italiana* in 2000, the museum once again contacted the artist with the intent of discussing a number of important issues of conservation and documentation that were not fully verified previously. The work, defined by the artist herself as “non-permanent,” is a mandala, a sort of mosaic of pieces that are not glued together, but simply placed on the ground, in which legume seeds and grains design the

form of a swastika (see Fig. 6.5 in color section). At the center of this composition, a Pyrex dish sitting on an electric hot plate contains boiling water and laurel leaves. The installation is connoted by a strong component of performance: during the setup and disassembly of the exhibition, both the action of “placing” and that of “removal” are accompanied by music selected by Bruna Esposito. During the exhibition the public is allowed to take a small bag of grains and legumes with them; each bag contains a poem by Paola d’Agnese.

The strong performative value, the explicit desire for interaction with the public, and the ephemeral nature of the work (the perishability of its components, together with the fact that it is not fixed to the floor, but simply sits on it), are the distinctive characteristics of the piece, beyond its objective materiality. Precisely these qualities complicated the acquisition of the work in 2000, documented in a video authorized by the artist. Bruna Esposito considers this video, whose rights were only recently conceded to the museum by Mara Chiaretti, and the photographs taken during its installation, as documentary materials and thus in no way a substitution for the work itself. In consideration of this condition, together with the fact that the museum had not acquired any other elements such as drawings or installation instructions, it was necessary to contact the artist again about the presentation of this work. The central question clarified with the artist was whether she considers the work to be replicable or not, taking into account that after 2000 the work was presented on three other occasions, with a few variations, related above all to the aspect of performance, in particular the music.

The result of this dialogue between the museum and artist was an agreement signed a year ago that has allowed the curators and conservators to define the status of the work, the editions, and the conditions of future exhibitions, especially with regard to preventing the risk of any possible misunderstandings of the use of the swastika.

It was also possible to identify an “other” form, with respect to the material, to ensure the persistence of this work within the collective memory and conscience: regarding the present and the future of *e così sia...* in the MAXXI collection, discussions with the artist focus on the hypothesis of developing a new form of video presentation, together with the possibility offered to the public to simply take (as in 2000) or purchase the small bags of legumes, grains, and poetry. According to the artist, this would actualize the persistence of the element of the dispersion of the materiality of the work, a memento of one of the distinctive traits of the work itself. Another possibility being evaluated is founded on the idea of the impossibility of reproducing a work designed to be ephemeral and non-repeatable, rendering the piece constantly visible and accessible on the Internet (not only during an exhibition), and thus offering a different form of persistence within the collection.

NOTES

- 1 This research is made possible with the support of Virtueel Platform and SKOR | Foundation for Art and Public Domain, both in Amsterdam. Thanks also to the members of the research group New Strategies in Conservation, in particular Renée van der Vall and Vivian van Saaze who commented on an earlier version of this article.
- 2 For an extensive account on the background and discussions on “document,” see for example Buckland (1991 and 1997), Day (2001), and Francke (2005).
- 3 See Oxford Dictionary of Latin.
- 4 The term “documentation”, and “documentalist” was mostly used in Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany and, to a lesser extent, in France and Great Britain. The United States very soon started to adopt the term “information science.” A full account on the meaning and implication of the different terminologies goes beyond the scope of this research; instead, I will focus on the use of documentation in as far as it is relevant to conservation. For more information on the history of the term “documentation” see, among others: Woledge (1983).
- 5 In the arts there is little research on the notion and implication of artists’ intent. Conservator Steven W. Dykstra (1996) is one of the few conservators who attempted to develop a clear understanding of the notion of artist’s intention in art conservation.
- 6 For an elaborate account see among others: Muñoz Viñas (2005); Laurensen (2006); and the recent anthology by Richmond and Bracker (2009).
- 7 Choices are inherently subjective, but the consequences of this subjective stance have only recently been addressed and acknowledged, most noticeably in the writing of Clavir (2002).
- 8 Matt Adams. personal interview between Blast Theory, Annet Dekker (Virtueel Platform), Liesbeth Huybrechts (BAM), and Priscilla Machils (BAM). Brighton, UK, 5 February 2010.
- 9 For more information about *Uncle Roy All Around You*: http://www.blasttheory.co.uk/bt/work_uncleroy.html.
- 10 Unless stated otherwise all the information about Blast Theory is taken from two interview sessions. The first with Matt Adams in Amsterdam (7 December 2009) and the second with the core members Matt Adams, Ju Row Farr, and Nick Tandavanitj in their studio in Brighton (5 February 2010). These interviews are conducted by Dekker and Huybrechts (BAM / Media & Design Academy, Genk, Belgium). For more information about Blast Theory see: <http://www.blasttheory.co.uk>.
- 11 The word “capture” means that something has been seized or taken control of. However, when applied to video, nothing really gets “captured” or seized. “Video merely makes marks on a magnetic tape – marks which offer no guarantee of

knowledge of the object that it is representing.” Becky Edmunds. “A Work of Art from A Work of Art.” (2007). <http://beckyedmunds.com/#/on-documentation/4531976852>. Last access: 12 September 2012. Nevertheless, in media art the term is now widely used for the process of documentation: “To record or make a lasting representation of (sound or images); as, to capture an event on videotape,” glossary, *Inside Installations* <http://www.inside-installations.org/onlinecoursevideodocumentation/module1/glos01.htm>.

- 12 See, for example, Phelan (1993: 146-166).
- 13 Becky Edmunds. “A Work of Art from A Work of Art.” (2007). <http://beckyedmunds.com/#/on-documentation/4531976852>. Last access: 12 September 2012.
- 14 The notion of tacit knowledge refers to the range of conceptual and sensory information, i.e., all forms of knowledge that cannot be represented: knowledge that cannot be fully articulated, expressed in formulas, or described in documents (Polanyi, 1966). The notion of tacit knowledge is not uncontested and is often viewed as subjective in conservation; it refers to the artist’s intent and the social and cultural context in which a work is presented or performed.
- 15 Becky Edmunds. “A Work of Art from A Work of Art.” (2007). <http://beckyedmunds.com/#/on-documentation/4531976852>. Last access: 12 September 2012.
- 16 This way the object, the video document, can also be regarded as a boundary object, passing between communities where it faces different interpretive strategies in each one. For further reading, see Star and Greisemer (1989). Massumi (2002) and Leach (2010) take the notion of the object further, claiming that the object has its own agency besides being merely a mediation tool.
- 17 An impression of the size of their archive: “Over the last 16 years we have meticulously archived every aspect of each project: creative notes, correspondence, publicity materials, press, design work, software, production manuals. The archive held by us includes 90 box files, 20 virtual models of cities and 900Gb stored on servers. Because we work in collaboration so frequently archival materials relating to our work are held elsewhere (such as the University of Nottingham), usually for technical or intellectual property reasons. These include logs, messages sent and received, audio recordings, etc..” Notes taken from a proposal that was used for Legacy, a one-off initiative developed in collaboration between the Live Art Development Agency and Tate Research, 2008.
- 18 See Winget (2008) and Dekker (2010: 7.1) on preservation strategies for gaming.
- 19 For more information see: <http://forging-the-future.net/> and <http://variablemediaquestionnaire.net/>.
- 20 Or, in the case where an artist has passed away, his/her collector, programmer, or technician – those closest to the artist and the work as it was made and exhibited.
- 21 <http://capturing.projects.v2.nl>.

- 22 <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/majorprojects/mediamatters/>.
- 23 <http://www.bampfa.berkeley.edu/about/formalnotation.pdf>.
- 24 See also: Delahunta & Shaw (2006), Winget (2008), Dekker (2010).
- 25 See, among others, Fauconnier & Fromme (2003), Jones (2007), Van Saaze (2009).
- 26 The idea of providing relations between different components (technical specifications) and occurrences (various situations and presentations: the ideal situation and minimal requirements) is further developed in the context of *Inside Movement Knowledge*. Elements of different models are adapted to the specific needs of contemporary dance documentation, see: Van Saaze, Dekker, and Wijers (2010).
- 27 See, among others: Van de Wetering (1989), Sloggett (1998), and Beerkens et al. (2012).
- 28 A method to capture different audience experiences was conducted by the research group during the Creator project (in which Blast Theory's project Rider Spoke was developed). The "digital replay system" shows an interactive juxtaposition of materials generated by different communities over time. "The system allows for new and unexpected discoveries as the work could be viewed through growing numbers of disciplinary lenses." (Chamberlain, 2010).
- 29 In the museum context this happens regularly, even with more traditional art forms. See Van Saaze's contribution to this chapter.
- 30 Geoffrey Bowker during his presentation at Memory of the Future, Ghent, June 2010.
- 31 Kunsthalle Zurich, 24 August 2002 – 27 October 2002; San Francisco MoMA, 14 December 2002 – 16 March 2003; the Institute of Visual Culture in Cambridge (UK), 14 December 2002 – 16 March 2003.
- 32 This text is based on literature research as well as on fieldwork conducted at the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (NL), for my Ph.D. research (Van Saaze 2009). Interviews with (former) staff members were conducted between 2004 and 2008. I am particularly grateful to the staff of the Van Abbemuseum for their generosity and time in our conversations.
- 33 See also: Lind (2007). For a historical account of the collaborative aspect in the arts, see: Green (2001).
- 34 Lind (2007). On the increase of collaboration practices in new media art, see also: Diamond (2008).
- 35 It is interesting to note that, in addition to several artists, other cultural producers such as the authors of the book *No Ghost, Just a Shell* (Huyghe and Parreno, 2003) were also considered contributors to the project.
- 36 In May 2006, the Van Abbemuseum lists 27 inventory numbers representing works by the following contributors: Pierre Huyghe, Philippe Parreno, Henri Barande, Angela Bulloch and Imke Wagener, François Curlet, Lili Fleury, Liam Gillick, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Pierre Joseph and Mehdi Belhaj-Kacem,

M/M Paris (Matthias Augustyniak and Michel Amzalag), Melik Ohanian, Richard Phillips, Joe Scanlan, Rirkrit Tiravanija, and Anna-Léna Vaney (source: museum registration system Van Abbemuseum, May 2006).

- 37 Interview Phillip Van den Bossche, curator of exhibitions Van Abbemuseum, 13 January 2005.
- 38 See also Jon Ippolito (2008) on the limitations of standard collection management systems.
- 39 Interview with Margo van de Wiel, registrar collection at Van Abbemuseum, 15 May 2008 and email correspondence 26 October 2009.
- 40 Particularly noteworthy are Kristel Van Audenaeren's M.A. thesis (2005) and Anne Mink's research and internship report (2007).
- 41 Interview Charles Esche, artistic director Van Abbemuseum, 27 March 2007.
- 42 See the contribution by Annet Dekker in this volume. I would also like to add the documentation models developed within the European research project Inside Installations (http://www.inside-installations.org/research/detail.php?r_id=482&ct=model).
- 43 See also: <http://still-water.net/>.
- 44 In the organization of the contemporary museum, the warehouse is conceived as the functional space for all museum activities and not, as was often the case in the past, as space dedicated to storage only. Inside MAXXI, which does not have a permanent exhibition of its collection, the warehouse plays a role of primary importance. It is worthwhile recalling how the Schaulager in Basel is organized neither as a simple "warehouse by design," nor as a museum with all works on display. The works are all installed and visible, though as if they were in storage, one beside the other, in closed and monographic spaces.
- 45 The INCCA now represents a platform of convergence for the most up-to-date research in the field of conserving contemporary art; it offers a guide for the realization of interviews with artists ("Guide to Good Practice: Artist's Interviews") that the MAXXI will use as a tool of research for documentation. See www.incca.org (last access: 20 August 2012).
- 46 We must carefully distinguish between a restoration done by the restorer, and an intervention by the artist. The latter should lead to an additional, second dating of the work.
- 47 Operating retroactively, the first critical act is already that of making a selection of the works to be documented, obviously beginning with those works in the collection that already present critical issues of conservation, or which may present problems.
- 48 DIC – *Documentare Installazioni Complesse* (Documenting Complex Installations) is a pilot project promoted and conducted by the *Civiche Raccolte di Milano* and the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage, involving the MAXXI and other Italian museums. During 2007, it was used to test the methodology of documentation

employed by the international group as part of the project *Inside Installations. Preservation and Presentation of Installation Art*. During the same year, the MAXXI *Installazioni* series presented three exhibitions of works from its permanent collection as the analysis of case studies of different problems related to the exhibition of complex installations with a technological basis. See Pugliese and Ferriani (2009).

- 49 The OAC – *Opera Arte Contemporanea* (Work of Contemporary Art) chart was proposed and developed by the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage's *Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione*. This chart is easy to fill out, consult, and update. Focused substantially on the analysis of material components and conservation issues, the chart was developed based on international models that were first proposed at the end of the project *Inside Installations*; it was reworked in light of the specific research pursued by the museum. Recent work has focused on the issue of archiving data and the possibility of creating connections between the two types of charts, to avoid repetition and integrate the most developed sections of the two models.
- 50 Installation: steel bars, painted wood, mirrors, 525 x 550 x 570 cm. MAXXI Collection.
- 51 The drawings and silkscreen print are not a part of the installation, but works on their own. The five drawings in the MAXXI collection belong to a series of 20 in total.
- 52 Project in progress of installation and destruction with epilogue singing by the artist (legumes, grains, laurel, hot plate, Pyrex container, water, bags containing a mix of legumes, grains, and poetry by Paola D'Agnesse), final overall size approximately 400 x 400 cm. MAXXI Collection.

| 191

REFERENCES

- Adamczyk, Piotr D. "Ethnographic Methods and New Media Preservation." In *Museums and the Web 2008. Proceedings*, edited by Jennifer Trant, and David Bearman. Toronto: Archives & Museum Informatics, 2008. [Http://www.archimuse.com/mw2008/papers/adamczyk/adamczyk.html](http://www.archimuse.com/mw2008/papers/adamczyk/adamczyk.html). Last access: 25 September 2012.
- Baker, George. "An Interview with Pierre Huyghe." *October* 110 (2004): 81-106.
- Beerkens, Lydia (et al.). *The Artist Interview. For conservation and presentation of contemporary art. Guidelines and practice*. Heijningen: Jap Sam Books.
- Benford, Steve, et al. "Can You See Me Now?" *ACM Transactions on Computer-Human Interaction* 13 (2006) 1: 100-133.
- Brandi, Cesare. *Il restauro. Teoria e pratica 1939 – 1986*. Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1994.
- Briet, Suzanne. *What is documentation?* Translated and edited by Ronald E. Day and Laurent Martinet with Hermina G.B. Anghelescu. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006.

- Buckland, Michael K. "What is a 'Document'?" *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* 48 (1997) 9: 804-809.
- . *Information and information systems*. New York: Greenwood, 1991.
- Chamberlain, Alan, Duncan Rowland, Jonathan Foster, and Gabriella Giannachi. "Riders Have Spoken: Replaying and Archiving Pervasive Performances." *Leonardo* 43 (2010) 1: 90-91. <http://www.crg.cs.nott.ac.uk/~azc/Riders/riderreport.htm>. Last access: 25 September 2012.
- Clavir, Miriam. *Preserving What Is Valued. Museums, Conservation and First Nations*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2002.
- Cook, Nicolas. "Words about Music, or Analysis versus Performance." In *Theory into Practice. Composition, Performance and the Listening Experience – Nicolas Cook, Peter Johnson, Hans Zender*, edited by Peter Dejjans, 9-52. Leuven: Leuven University Press, Orpheus Institute, 1999.
- Day, Ronald E. *The Modern Invention of Information. Discourse, History, and Power*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001.
- Dekker, Annet, ed. *Archive 2020. Sustainable Archiving of Born Digital Cultural Content*. Amsterdam: Virtueel Platform, 2010.
- Delahunta, Scott, and Norah Zuniga Shaw. "Constructing Memories. Creation of the Choreographic Resource." *Performance Research* 11 (2006) 4: 53-62.
- Depocas, Alain. "Digital Preservation. Recording the Recording. The Documentary Strategy." In *Takeover. Who is doing the art of tomorrow. Ars Electronica Catalog*, edited by Gerfried Stocker and Christine Schöpf, 334-339. Vienna: Springer-Verlag, 2001.
- Depocas, Alain, Jon Ippolito, and Caitlin Jones (eds.). *Permanence Through Change. The Variable Media Approach*. New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation & Montreal: Daniel Langlois Foundation for Art, Science and Technology, 2003.
- Diamond, Sara. "Participation, Flow, and the Redistribution of Authorship. The Challenges of Collaborative Exchange and New Media Curatorial Practice." In *New Media in the White Cube and Beyond. Curatorial Models for Digital Art*, edited by Christiane Paul, 135-162. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.
- Dykstra, Steven W. "The Artist's Intentions and the Intentional Fallacy in Fine Arts Conservation." *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation*. 35 (1996) 3: 197-218.
- Fauconnier, Sandra, and Rens Frommé. *Capturing Unstable Media. Summary of research*. Rotterdam: V2_, 2003. <http://www.v2.nl/archive/articles/capturing-unstable-media/view>. Last access: 25 September 2012.
- Fluegel, Katharina. "Dokumentation als museale Kategorie." *Rundbrief Fotografie, Sonderheft 6. Verwandlungen durch Licht. Fotografieren in Museen & Archiven & Bibliotheken*. Esslingen: Museumsverband Baden-Württemberg, 2001: 19-29.
- Foster, Hal. "An Archival Impulse." *October* 110 (2004): 3-22.
- Francke, Helena. "What's in a Name? Contextualizing the Document Concept." *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 20 (2005) 1: 61-69.

- Green, Charles. *The Third Hand. Collaboration in Art from Conceptualism to Postmodernism*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.
- Hummelen, IJsbrand. "Conservation Strategies for Modern and Contemporary Art. Recent Developments in the Netherlands." *Cr* 3 (2005): 22-26.
- Huyghe, Pierre, and Philippe Parreno (eds.). "*No Ghost Just a Shell*". *Un film d'imaginaire*. Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 2003.
- Ippolito, Jon (2008). "Death by Wall Label." In *New Media in the White Cube and Beyond. Curatorial Models for Digital Art*, edited by Christiane Paul, 106-130. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.
- Jones, Caitlin. *State of the Art (of Documentation). Three Case Studies for the Daniel Langlois Foundation's Ten Year Anniversary Exhibition*. Montreal: Daniel Langlois Foundation, 2007. <http://www.fondation-langlois.org/html/e/page.php?NumPage=1988>. Last access: 25 September 2012.
- Kraemer, Harald. "Art Is Redeemed, Mystery Is Gone. The Documentation of Contemporary Art." In *Theorizing Digital Cultural Heritage. A Critical Discourse*, edited by Fiona Cameron and Sarah Kenderdine, 193-222. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007. | 193
- Laurenson, Pip. "Authenticity, Change and Loss in the Conservation of Time-based Media Installations." *Tate Papers. Tate's Online Research Journal* (Autumn 2006). <http://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/7401>. Last access: 25 September 2012.
- Leach, James. "Intervening with the Social. Ethnographic practice and Tarde's image of relations between subjects." In *The Social After Gabriel Tarde*, edited by Matei Candea, 191-207. London: Routledge, 2010.
- Lind, Maria. "The Collaborative Turn." In *Taking the Matter into Common Hands*, edited by Johanna Billing, Maria Lind, and Lars Nilsson, 15-31. London: Black Dog Publishing, 2007.
- Lurk, Tabea, and Jürgen Enge. "Sustaining Dynamic Media Objects and Digital System Environments. An Assessment of Preservation Methods for Computer Based Artworks." Unpublished paper, Bern University of the Arts, 2010. http://www.hfg.edu/images/b/b4/LurkEnge_SustainingDynamicDigitalObjects.pdf. Last access: 25 September 2012.
- Lycouris, Sophia. "The Documentation of Practice. Framing Trace." *Working Papers in Art and Design* 1 (2000): http://sitem.herts.ac.uk/artdes_research/papers/wpades/vol1/lycouris2.html.
- MacDonald, Corina. "Scoring the Work. Documenting Practice and Performance in Variable Media Art." *Leonardo* 42 (2009) 1: 59-63.
- Massumi, Brian. *Parables for the Virtual/ Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002.
- Mink, Anne. *No Ghost Just a Shell. inhoud, context en praktijk*. Research and internship report, Radboud University Nijmegen, 2007.
- Muller, Lizzie. "Oral History and the Media Art Audience." In *Archive 2020. Sustainable*

Archiving of Born Digital Cultural Content, edited by Annet Dekker, 6.0-6.9. Amsterdam: Virtueel Platform, 2010.

Muñoz Viñas, Salvador. *Contemporary Theory of Conservation*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2005.

Otlet, Paul. *Traité de documentation. Le Livre sur le Livre. Théorie et Pratique*. Brussels: Editiones Mundaneum, 1934.

Phelan, Peggy. *Unmarked. The Politics of Performance*. London: Routledge, 1993.

Polanyi, Michael. *The Tacit Dimension*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966.

Pugliese, Marina. *Tecnica mista. Materiali e procedimenti nell'arte del XX secolo*. Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2006.

—, and Barbara Ferriani. *Monumenti effimeri. Storia e conservazione delle installazioni*. Milan: Electa, 2009.

Richmond, Alison, and Alison Bracker (eds.). *Conservation Principles, Dilemmas and Uncomfortable Truths*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann in collaboration with Victoria and Albert Museum London, 2009.

Rinehart, Richard. "A System of Formal Notation for Scoring Works of Digital and Variable Media Art." Unpublished paper. Available online: <http://www.bampfa.berkeley.edu/about/formalnotation.pdf>. Last access: 12 November 2012.

Sloggett, Robyn. "Beyond the Material. Idea, Concept, Process, and Their Function in the Conservation of the Conceptual Art of Mike Parr." *The American Institute for Conservation of Historic & Artistic Works* 37 (1998) 3: 316-333.

Star, Susan Leigh, and James Griesemer. "Institutional Ecology, Translations and Boundary Objects. Amateurs and Professionals in Berkeley's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, 1907-39." *Social Studies of Science* 19 (1989): 387-420.

Svenonius, Elaine. "Access to Nonbook Materials. The Limits of Subject Indexing for Visual and Aural Languages." *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* 45 (1994) 8: 600-606.

Van Audenaeren, Kristel. *Het Kunstenaarsproject No Ghost Just a Shell: un film d'imaginaire. Van netwerkvorming tot tentoonstelling*. M.A. thesis, Ghent University, 2005.

Van der Beek, Wim. "AnnLee: No Ghost." *Kunstbeeld Cahier. Het Nieuwe Van Abbe* (2003): 41-44.

Van de Wetering, Ernst. "The Autonomy of Restoration. Ethical Considerations in Relation to Artistic Concepts." In *Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage*, edited by Nicholas Stanley Price, M. Kirby Talley, and Alessandra Melucco Vaccaro, 193-199. Malibu, CA: J. Paul Getty Trust, 1996.

Van Mastrigt, Jeroen. *PLAY. Utrecht Playground for Games and Playful Culture*. Utrecht: Gemeente Utrecht, 2009.

Van Saaze, Vivian. *Doing Artworks. A Study into the Presentation and Conservation of Installation Artworks*. Ph.D. diss., Maastricht University and the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage, 2009.

- , Annet Dekker, and Gaby Wijers. “The Interview as Knowledge Production Tool in Contemporary Art and Dance Documentation.” *RTRSARCH. [NOTATION]* 2 (2010) 2: 18-22.
- Waters, Donald, and John Garrett. *Preserving Digital Information. Report of the Task Force on Archiving of Digital Information*. Washington, DC: Council on Library and Information Resources, 1996.
- Wilkie, Fiona. “Documenting Live and Mediated Performance – the Blast Theory Case Study.” In *A Guide to Good Practice in Collaborative Working Methods and New Media Tools Creation (by and for artists and the cultural sector)*, edited by Lizbeth Goodman and Katherine Milton. London: Kings College, 2004: <http://www.ahds.ac.uk/creating/guides/new-media-tools/wilkie.htm>. Last access: 25 September 2012.
- Windfeld Lund, Niels. “Doceo + mentum – a ground for a new discipline.” Unpublished paper presented at the *DOCAM '03* conference, 13-15 August 2003, SIMS, University of California-Berkeley. [Http://thedocumentacademy.org/resources/2003/papers/lund.paper.html#_ftn14](http://thedocumentacademy.org/resources/2003/papers/lund.paper.html#_ftn14). Last access: 25 September 2012.
- Winget, Megan. “Collecting and Preserving Videogames and Their Related Materials. A Review of Current Practice, Game-Related Archives and Research Projects.” Unpublished paper, presented at the *Annual Meeting of the American Society for Information Science & Technology (ASIS&T)*. Columbus, OH, 24-29 October 2008.
- Woledge, Geoffrey. “Historical Studies in Documentation. ‘Bibliography’ and ‘Documentation.’ Words and Ideas.” *Journal of Documentation*, 39 (1983) 4: 266-279.