

Expert Meeting

01/12/2016, Amsterdam

Maaïke Bleeker

The lectures were opened by Maaïke Bleeker, professor of Theatre Studies at Utrecht University. By arguing for the potential of theatre/theatricality, and dance/performativity, as a 'critical vision machine', Maaïke questioned how various technologies, from the more conventional to the very new, can be used to archive, share and understand dance movement. Staging, repertoire, remakes, enactment, and reenactment were discussed by Maaïke as different strategies for preserving cultural heritage that are practiced and accepted in other disciplines. Maaïke began her talk by distinguishing between the ways texts and performances can be preserved: preserving the text of a theatre play in a library is not the same thing as preserving the play. Maaïke drew on performance scholar Diana Taylor's distinction between *archive* and *repertoire* to make this point. The *repertoire of embodied memory*—conveyed in gestures, the spoken word, movement, dance, song, and other performances—is discussed by Taylor as a proposition for alternative perspectives to those derived from the written archive and particularly useful for a reconsideration of historical processes of transnational contact. The archive is thus understood as a tool to investigate the past, to go backwards, while repertoire brings the past into a live present; that is, repertoire has a "future-orientedness." Paul Kaiser's choreography *Loops* is taken as a case study. The original work *Loops* was created and performed as a solo by Merce Cunningham, who performed the work many times, often with significant differences between performances. (At first the work was a full-body choreography; later, when Cunningham was too old to perform the piece in this way, he performed it only with his hands.) With the intention of preserving the piece after Cunningham's death, Kaiser used motion-capture technology to record one performance of *Loops*; but, as Bleeker notes, Kaiser's problem is that recording one performance of *Loops* does not preserve the choreography—the "logic of the work"—but only one instantiation of it. This limits our understanding of the choreography to its embodiment. William Forsythe's project *Synchronous Objects*, conversely, poses the question: What if bodily movement is not the only way of realising a "choreographic object"? The choreographic object is not limited to a particular 'materialisation', but open to infinite potential materialisations. A third case study: *The Motion Bank* is an online platform that generates choreographic scores in such a way that the preservation of a work becomes, via the many different scores it can generate, a "continuous reinterpretation." Returning to *Loops*, Maaïke describes the way in which Kaiser likewise used his motion-capture data to generate an ongoing choreography based on the "logic" of Cunningham's movements.

Being aware nonetheless that dance and performance have no text to be reproduced as theatre, or any code or notation to be interpreted as music, Maaïke poses the question: *What then is exactly that needs to be preserved?* What do we choose to preserve? Preservation is discussed hence as a subjective action, as a variable process tightly subjected to the choices of particular moments, contexts and motivations: conservation as an interpretation, a new act (Giannachi, 2016). (Interestingly, and important to notice, this question was also raised during the second Network meeting.) Interestingly, and as Maaïke follows, reinterpretation is able to ask one of the most important and yet more difficult questions of all: What is a work? What exactly is its essence, if any? Why preserve this characteristic of the work and not another one? Here it comes to mind how Jon Ipólito talks about an 'original spirit' of the work of art, stating that reinterpretation "sacrifices basic aspects of the work's appearance in order to retain the *original spirit*." But can we talk about an 'original' when we approach preservation as a subjective act? Will then that original spirit change within every reinterpretation?

What does the work become, both the one agreed as the 'original' and the one functioning as

reinterpretation? What do you preserve in one case and in the other? And how to give answer to this question while thinking about the potential of futurity? In other words, how to think about reinterpretation not so much as an affirmation of the past but rather as a tool to question the present? (Arns and Horn, 2008, in Giannachi, 2016).

Jan Robert Leegte

Following Bleeker's presentation, artist Jan Robert Leegte proposes thinking about reinterpretation as a tool for "rooting" a way of thinking in relation to the digital, and also as a possible way to emancipate the platform of the digital. Reinterpretation is exposed by Jan Robert as an artistic method able to zoom in on specific aspects of a piece, in its previous set ups and in how those could be contextualized in a new digital context.

Jan Robert used a number of case studies: First, net artist Ryan Barone's remakes of Yves Klein's blue monochromes. Barone's work shows an apparently infinite series of Klein blues retrieved from Google searches. Jan Robert's own work *bluemonochrome.com* works similarly, using Google Maps to zoom in on areas of the Pacific Ocean to form a series of monochromes. Second, Jan Roberts's piece based on Bruce Nauman's *The true artist helps the world be revealing mystic truths*, called *theimmaterialmaterialised.com*. With this work Jan Robert is concerned with "repositioning artist's questions from the past in the context of the now." Third, Jan Robert's remakes of works by Richard Long and Robert Smithson on the Second Life platform. Fourth, Jan Robert's work *A black square embedded in social media*. In this work a black square (referring to Malevich's famous painting) is embedded across six different social media platforms. By using his own work as a main case study in this presentation, Robert proposes the idea of 'revision', and he suggests the importance to understand the ambivalence of materiality within digital media and platforms. Thereafter, he suggests looking back to propose a revision in the present, confronting questions that the artist posed before and being able to re-contextualize it to the now by the creation of a new piece.

Sanneke Stigter

To end up the lectures, Sanneke Stigter, Assistant Professor in Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Heritage at the University of Amsterdam brought into the meeting the importance of the ethics of preservation and conservation. For Sanneke, although reinterpretation tell us a lot about the work itself, she asks if reinterpretation is still conservation? In order to answer this question, Sanneke uses the research made by the Variable Media Network and their attribution to behaviours to different art works. As in many occasions during the project UNFOLD has been also discussed, within the Variable Media Network project reinterpretation is described as a dangerous technique.

Through examining various case studies of reinstallations of Jan Dibbets's works *A White Wall*, *Comet Sea*, and *The Shortest Day at the Vanabbemuseum*. Sanneke was involved in these installations as a conservator, working with both the museums and the artist to create them.

In the second part of her talk Sanneke discusses ethnography as a research method in museums. She compares her method of autoethnography to Vivian van Saaze's "participatory observation" (in *Installation Art and the Museum* (2013)) and Glenn Wharton's "participatory action research" (in *The Painted King* (2012)). Storytelling is central to Sanneke's method.

The final part of the presentation was devoted to Dibbets's *All the shadows that occurred to me...* (1969). Sanneke compares three installations of the work made at the Kröller-Müller Museum

between 2009 and 2013. These installations involved a minor dispute over the title of the work between the Museum's curators and the artist (with whom the Museum was in intermittent contact during the installations): the Museum altered the 'me' of the title to 'us' for the 2012 installation, but for another exhibition the following year they changed the 'us' back to 'me' in deference to the artist's wishes. Later, however, Dibbets contradicted himself by taking issue with the 'me', stating that he himself wasn't responsible for the installation.

Sanneke concludes by suggesting that reinterpretation is a valuable "research tool" rather than as a conservation strategy. In other words, she discusses the act of reinstallation as a possible act of reinterpretation, and although gaining knowledge can be seen as a conservation method, she is very dubious about including reinterpretation as a conservation strategy. Here, however, the idea of authorship is very much rooted in Sanneke's presentation. Similarly to the Variable Media Network project, Sanneke thinks that every act of reinterpretation should be supervised by the artist.

Questions

Josephine Bosma opened the discussion by asking Stigter whether conservators now would like to be seen more as artists. Sanneke responded that unless something goes wrong in the conservation process, conservators remain largely invisible. Her job, she says, is to be as transparent as possible about the ways in which institutions reinterpret the artworks they exhibit.

In response to Lara's question as to whether, through his artistic practice, he felt like a conservator, Leegte stated instead that he sees his work as a way of formulating what kind of space the digital space is by bringing to the digital platform "former conclusions" that artists have drawn in relation to the media they work with.

Gaby asked Maaïke: Do we have choreographic objects in the digital art realm? Maaïke responded by suggesting that William Forsythe's project shows how choreography could be used as a way of thinking through the digital and rethinking how objects function as regenerative type of abstraction. Jan Robert followed, remarking that the digital is the natural habitat of such infinite restagings. Here Gaby suggests to reflect on how Peter Bogers argues that "[i]deally, each new presentation of an installation is documented, but from case to case there is no authoritative presentation form; the work is made of the overall sequence of all presentations" (Peter Bogers Ritual 1 & 2 1997).

Christian commented on the various roles of authors in the examples given in all three presentations. In Sanneke's presentation, the author (Dibbets) is always present: is there then no "danger" in his own 'reinterpretations' of his own works? In *Loops* the work was connected so strongly to the artist's body that when it comes to preserving it the work is bigger than the artist; the artist seems to eclipse the work. And in Jan's presentation, the canonical works that he remakes signify the canonical status of the artists so strongly that they bring the artist back as a kind of cultural demiurge. Sanneke responds: She doesn't think that is the artist always right about their own work. Working with artists to reinstall earlier works can tell us a lot about the work, but can also raise sensitive issues (such as copyright). But dialogue with artists, where possible, is always crucial in such situations. Maaïke suggests that, although the name of author is made present in *Loops*, there is a difference between Cunningham being the *origin* of the work and the *effect* of the work. In the end, the author comes to be defined by what the work is.

Josephine concluded the meeting with a critical point: that our discussion of reinterpretation has led us away from thinking about the materiality of the digital. Maaïke responded by explaining that the examples she chose invite a rethinking of what is at stake in preservation if it is not preserving an

'origin'.