

## Second Network Meeting

14/09/2016 LIMA, Amsterdam

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### Update Gaby & Lara

Lara began her update on the research project by stressing the continuing need to position 're-interpretation' in our vocabulary: as a mode of mediation, of transmission, and of preservation. Returning to the conclusions extracted from the 1st Network Meeting, it is proposed that we think of preservation as a creative act, and consider its technical specificity in the age of digital reproduction. How to keep the liveness of a piece in different contexts? Or, to what extent is the context really important? Could we merely concentrate on the sensorial experience? On the perception of a spatial experience? More broadly, Lara reminds us through her presentation that one of the key questions exposed during the 1st network meeting was: How do we mediate to future generations what we do now? In order to continue thinking along the same line, Lara recalls several possible methodologies, supported by case studies, that were questioned during the first meeting.

First, she returns to Gabriella Giannachi's presentation, in which she suggested using audiences and their modes of documentation (eg. using mobile phones to take pictures and videos) as an archiving strategy, raising the question: To what extent, and how, could the audience be used as a methodology to unpack the liveness of an event or documentation?

Second, and bringing back Suzan Tunca's arguments and her research on notions of the 'intuitive body', Lara refers to the work of Manuel Delgado and Alexandra Piricci as an example of what she understands as "the re-interpretation of artworks through the use of the body;" or, what Delgado and Piricci would call the idea of an 'embodied history'; that is, the body used as a medium in their work. Here, Lara uses two main figures in performance studies such as Diana Taylor and Peggy Phelan to present a main problematic. On the one hand, Diana Taylor (professor of performance studies at the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University), in a similar line to Tunca, Delgado and Piricci, suggests that "one of the main aims of performance and Performance Studies is precisely to seriously consider the repertoire of embodied practices as an important system of knowing and transmitting knowledge." In other words, through embodiment, and therefore through the use of the body as a form of archive, we enable performance to 'remain'. From the other side, nonetheless, Peggy Phelan, American feminist scholar and one of the founders of Performance Studies International, argues that "the process of selection, memorization or internalization, and transmission takes place within (and in turn helps constitute) specific systems of re-presentation." For Phelan, performance is so closely linked to the dimension of 'present' and 'presence' that any attempt to preserve it record it or reproduce it is in itself flawed or deficient. Interesting within this discourse is to bring Maaïke A. Bleeker's definition of re-enactment in which she proposes that, "Re-enactment all too easily promotes a conflation of past and present, as well as a mixing up of positions within—and with regard to—past and present situations. [...] Re-enactment [...] seems to promise an embodied understanding of the past, while in fact what is experienced is one's own embodied experiences in the here and now, and not those of a historical agent."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Maaïke A. Bleeker, '(Un)Covering Artistic Thought Unfolding', *Project Muse*, p. 14, winter 2012.

Third, and thinking about bringing alive notations and how an artist can preserve his/her pieces through the use of notation, Lara discusses the exhibition *Anthology*, presented at MoMA, New York, in 2011-12. In this exhibition, artist Clifford Owens, in his will to give voice to African-American performer artists, asked 26 major artists to contribute to the exhibition while giving him “scores”—written or graphical instructions for actions—in order for him to bring their pieces into the museum. Here, documentation and notation are used as instruments for generating research trajectories and new knowledges.

Fourth (and finally), Lara questions of whether it is only artists that could be granted the license to creatively re-interpret artworks. To what extent does the museum also reinterpret pieces of art when using specific curatorial solutions or exhibition configurations? In that sense, she suggests having a closer look into the remaking, at the Venice Biennale 2013, of the 1969 exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form*. In this exhibition (and in Lara’s opinion) the show tried to maintain the original visual and formal relations between the different pieces as much as possible, resembling the curatorial language that was proposed already by Harald Szeemann.

So what can we make of the recent wave of restaged, recreated, and reprised exhibitions of art? For Lara, what is clear is that this is a result of a maturation of curatorial studies as a discipline with its own parameters and history. And yet, she suggests not forgetting that an exhibition is a composition of different art pieces, some of which may be of an ephemeral nature. Therefore, what could happen within the next hundred years with those pieces? Could we use re-interpretation to ‘actualize’ these pieces? For Lara, it is also crucial to point out how in a museum you have interpretation in the explanations of the works. In that sense, could reinterpretation also help on how do we look at a work? Could reinterpretation be something that is enabling us to re-engage with the work in a different way? Indeed, re-interpretation could be definitely understood as something that we do ourselves directly every day.

As a conclusion Lara argues how, from her perspective, Media art is as much performative or behavior-centric as it is artifactual or object-centric. Media and especially digital art are variable from the moment they are created. They may be authored on one specific brand of computer hardware and software platform, but they could also be presented under a very different configuration without changing its essence. As theorist Richard Rinehart suggests, “[f]or works of Internet art, aspects such as color, scale, and speed can vary significantly when viewed on different monitors over different network speeds. This variability is not considered corruptive but rather an inherent property of the medium and the work. Digital art will almost certainly use different hardware for presentation or performance a hundred years from now, but it can still be considered authentic.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Lara informs that it is precisely from this idea of ‘Authenticity’ and ‘Authorship’ that the next expert meeting of UNFOLD is going to turn around.

### **Sander van Maas: Music and Reinterpretation**

In his presentation, Sander van Maas focused on some of the repercussions of his observation that “music has moved beyond performance paradigm.” Here, he points out the increasing number of concerns with archivization in music, such as the problems posed through digital availability through network streamings; in other words, different settings in which music is no longer ‘attached to’ the performance. These are concerns that “have been an obsession for centuries.” Sander gave

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Rinehart, ‘A System of Formal Notation for Scoring Works of Digital and Variable Media Art’, University of California (Berkeley), p.3, 2009

examples of creative repurposings in various music practices: sparking conversation later was his anecdote of conductor Willem Mengelberg's addition of a crash cymbal to a score by Tchaikovsky during a rehearsal in Budapest—a rare example of a conductor changing the content of the musical score.

For Sander, the question of performance is also a question of the search for time. Here he proposed thinking around keywords such as 'presence', 'actualization', and 'future'. Re-interpretation has been a key term in music for a long time. Sander presented familiar examples such as cover bands, who generally recreate musical works with a minimal differences from the originals. When playing covers live, the addition of liveness is that the music is already there in the memory is being activated by the performance. Can we find corollaries between music re-interpretation and what UNFOLD is trying to propose? What are the similarities between a music reinterpretation and reinterpreting a media artwork?

Second example: For an edition of Bob Marley's complete works, the producers decide to equalise Marley's extreme tempo fluctuations, with the intention that the subsequent recordings would be more radio-friendly. Sander notes that we demand from music this "fantasmatic" archival function. During the participant's response to his talk, Sander introduced the concept of *Werktreuen*—being 'loyal' to the work. What practical boundaries does this ethical concept prescribe? And at what degree of (re-)interpretive flexibility does a new artwork allow to emerge?

After Sander's presentation, these questions became broadened through into a critical discussion about the notion of re-interpretation. Why the 're-'? Sander suggested that this prefix predicates an accountability to the original event. Moreover, Sander suggested to think re-interpretation in relation to time: what is exactly that we find important about the experience of music? Martine Neddham offered an alternative notion of a work's 'travelling', giving Frankenstein as an example of a fictional character unpredictably peregrinating among various media forms, multiplying the possibilities of its imaginative formulation. Sander extemporised further how mediation has changed through archiving. How does this change my relation to time in live performance, what is the future of time in music? Gabriella Giannachi notes the increasing obfuscation of the border between documentation and artwork in current museological practice: what was once thought of as a work's documentation (eg. a photograph or video) increasingly comes to be treated as the work 'itself'. As such, museums offer opportunities for audiences to look at the works in different ways; could we consider this as re-interpretation? When documenting the interpretation of a given art work, what is already in me that is being re-activated? Could we also document how we arrive at certain interpretations?

### **Joost Rekveld & Kristin Scheving: Update**

Joost Rekveld updated us about the two pieces he is re-interpreting. The first one is *Telc* (1974), a work by Woody and Steina Vasulka that uses a scan processor to transform Portapak images from a trip to a town in southern Bohemia. The second work is *Reminiscence* (1974) which shows Portapak images from a visit to a farmhouse in Moravia (where Woody spent some time in childhood) that are later processed in such a way as to de-familiarize the encounter with his past. Rekveld explained how he has chosen to concentrate on the importance of the perception of space to proceed with a re-interpretation of those two pieces. In a practical manner, he is developing wearable perceptive devices with antennas to communicate signals from the environment to vibrations on an armband.

Evaluating the progress of this project, he says that these devices are quite crude; and he intends to refine them by moving towards imaging techniques.

Kristin Scheving, head of the Vasulkas' chamber in Reykjavik (Iceland), explained to us how the chamber is being a challenging project, receiving large amounts of the Vasulkas' personal documents and 80% of their digital work. The chamber opened on October 2014, and is an ongoing archival project. Scheving recounts her experiences as the Vasulkas' archivist and showed us some minutes of her daily talks with the Vasulkas, who are following the archival process quite closely. Scheving's presentation poses questions such as: How do we preserve and how? Or how, based on the notion of interpretation, one could argue that a re-interpretation is an interpretation on the top of an interpretation.

### **Martine Neddham: The use of visual characters who lead an autonomous artistic existence + The use of language as a raw material.**

Martine Neddham presented her ongoing online artwork [mouchette.org](http://mouchette.org) (1997 - today), and elaborated on her concept of generative preservation. A text is generative when it calls for more text—a (non-rhetorical) question is one example. Martine emphasized how she understands her work as part of a continuous creation in which the intervention of the user is central: an adventure experience. For Neddham, it is crucial to involve the viewer in the experience of browsing, on taking part and giving a response. 'Generative' does not just referring to the generation of code, but involves the process and the action of generating.

The 're-' of 're-interpretation' is nonetheless problematic for Neddham; it presupposes that there is one identifiable beginning or unity in the artwork. In order to support her statement, Martine uses [mouchette.org](http://mouchette.org) as an example. [Mouchette.org](http://mouchette.org) derives its generative capacity in an ecology that Martine calls "generative transmission": "with internet you can't really separate the art from the circulation of the art, the piece from the museum. Before the net I was working with generated text (with algorithms, Markov chainers etc...). I realised through the interactive narratives of Mouchette that generated text could happen in the form of a question generating an answer." As she also noted, "in internet you cannot separate the actual work from its transmission." Am I the artist or the museum? Am I creating or preserving? Am I giving access to the art or disseminating the art?

An artwork's preservation, therefore, is in part predicated on the vicissitudes of this unpredictable ecology. [Rhizome.org](http://rhizome.org) has created emulators for different platforms and browsers versions. Martine discussed how this can be a valid solution, but for an art site that spans on more than 15 years, it's not a real solution; therefore Martine does not repair the code case by case. As a mode of comparison, Martine also drew on the figure of the Mechanical Turk: a 18th-Century counterfeit chess-playing automaton that was in fact operated by a human inside it.

### **Debate: Reinterpretation as Creative Act - Liveness as mediation**

After Martine's presentation, the debate began by questioning the importance to find the origin of any re-interpretation. Here, notions such as the original, authenticity or the author came up throughout the discussion, revolving around one main concern: To what extent does a re-interpretation need to adhere to the artist's intentions?

One main concern during the debate is how to integrate all the knowledge from other disciplines within digital media art. It is argued how difficult, and perhaps unproductive, it has been to try to come

up with a concrete definition of re-interpretation to be further applied to all the disciplines. Rather than being concerned with that, it is proposed that we talk about the 'dimensions' of a work in which re-interpretation would be one action between others. By doing so, it is proposed that we try mapping re-interpretation within those different dimensions. Coming from a musicological perspective, Sander van Maas proposed taking into consideration the notion of time—how time changes and transforms, and how time can also talk about process rather than a final object that seems finite. The discussion moved at this stage to the awareness of the 'live circle of a work', and how this is processed or mediated. It is a multidimensional space in which many subjects are included.

Claudia also brought up the importance of professional conservation ethics, as it guides one on how to treat an object. She argued that an important guideline for a conservator would be to ask: What is the artist's intention? How can we preserve the artist's intention? Elisabeth Schimana, however, talked about the 'in-between', about what was not considered to be repaired. She also pointed out the influence of preservation ethics, and how it seems not allowed to change original parts with other parts. Institutions such as museums are not allowed to do that, and yet, for Schimana, there are a lot of in-between spaces of what it is possible to do or not. Institutions are now working with authenticity reports of art works; these are statements of intent, like a testament of the artist. Museums, for example, work with authenticity reports only when they commission and buy the work, not when they are hosting the work. MoMA and Tate negotiate a lot with artists, along with referring to the documentation of the artwork.

It is agreed by all the participants of the debate that a more productive way of working would be to use concrete case studies. This debate ends up by discussing how a re-interpretation of a work is always personal-subjective and that to come up with a concrete list of core elements to preserve while using re-interpretation as a strategy can be problematic. Indeed, within conservation/preservation strategies we can talk about storing, migration, emulation, and—the most layered strategy— re-interpretation, as this latter strategy seems to always include a subjective perspective. Perhaps that is why re-interpretation is one of the strategies that has been less researched within preservation.

### **Karin de Wild: Memory structures for digital/internet art within art institutes**

In her talk on the 2016 exhibition at Dundee's Centrespace Gallery entitled *JODI: Variable Art for the ZX Spectrum*, Karin de Wild positioned re-interpretation as a way of remembering digital culture. JODI is the collective name for Dutch artist duo Joan Heemskerk and Dirk Paesmans. This exhibition featured their experiments with ZX Spectrum, an 8-bit home computer manufactured in Dundee. In addition to the original computers, the artists deployed an array of other media: emulations of the ZX Spectrum for contemporary desktop computers, wall-mounted images, video works, etc. Karin asserted that preserving new media works means preserving their variable nature: "a new media object is not fixed once and for all but can exist in different, potentially infinite, versions." Karin also proposed that there are difficulties in following the work's diverse trajectories: Should we then include interpretation of other artists as well? And which interpretations should we and should we not include? Drawing on Hito Steyerl and Georges Didi-Huberman's, De Wild emphasized how artworks are destined to circulate and how, throughout this movement, new forms will arise. Can this circulation help new generations to have a better understanding of digital art? Here, she discussed how re-interpretation might give fewer references to the past, but how, on the other hand, it is able to highlight foundational elements of the work.

De Wild also brought up the idea of the origin or the lineality of time: can we still think from a beginning to an end? Or should we talk about different faces in the actualization of the art works? As Hans Belting proposes, "we must address the image not only as a product of a given medium [...] but

also as a product of ourselves, for we generate new meanings every time.” Preservation is always changing. It can reconcile opposites. But how much change it is allowed? How does an artwork change and why? How can an artwork be preserved in different media platforms? How much history do we preserve?

When talking about net art, do we need to refer to the physical space as well as the person? Is it useful to have a display of what is actually happening inside the world? Do we also need to preserve the experience of playing?

### **Emma Panza: De-Skilling Curation**

Between March 1979 and October 1980, Amsterdam art institution De Appel hosted a series of *Open Avond* events; these were essentially open calls for performance artists. Using the archive of De Appel as her resource for research, curator Emma Panza drew on documentation of these events to revisit the form, hosting her own *Open Avond* on 15 June 2016. The aim of her research was to investigate the relations and overlappings between performative practice and curatorial practice; working with the archive of De Appel allowed her to search for inspiration, and to develop strategies, for how this could be done.

Initially her inspiration came from dance and performance pieces—she gives the examples of an untitled work (2000) by Tino Seghal, and Boris Charmatz’s *Flip Book*—that proposed ways of engaging with historical material. In working with De Appel, an important aspect of Emma’s research was into the history of the institution itself: at its beginnings, in the early 1970s, it was an important institution for establishing performance art in Europe; today, however, its programme consists mostly of ‘traditional’ exhibitions by well-known artists. De Appel has recently taken on a new board of directors, and the reassessment of its own history has, according to Emma, been part of the process of recalibrating its *raison d’être* as an institution; Emma intended her work to form part of this process of reflection.

Approaching the archive presented an opportunity for Emma to investigate the ways in which she could “perform” the role of curator. She set up a series of three events called *De-skilling Curation*, which functioned as workshops for performers to “open” their practices, and to “live” the work, rather than simply looking at it. The *Open Avond* format—a similar approach—allowed Emma to ‘mediate’ the archive through working with performers. On the basis of the open call, five artists were selected and combined with archival material: combinations were made on the basis of perceived affinities between an artist’s proposal and the archival material—a “vibe” or “direction” more than a topic in common.

At the beginning of the *Open Avond*, Emma performed a “playful” reading of De Appel’s mission statement, an action that intersected the roles of performer and curator. In her presentation Emma recounted the performances that took place during the *Open Avond* she curated. Several were attempts to reconstruct past performance or actions from scant documentation. The *Open Avond* format provided a platform for “playing” with the archive of De Appel—both for Emma as curator, and for the performers.

### **Discussion: Conclusion**

In concluding the network meeting, Gaby suggested that participants put forward for discussion

examples of how media artworks are preserved. Here, Elisabeth Schimana briefly presented her book *Max Brand: Maschinen für die Oper*.

As argued in the previous debate, working with concrete case studies or in small discussion groups would be much more productive for the network. One main conclusion and further suggestion for research was also to start identifying the differences between reinterpretation and other modes of preservation in order to start contextualizing it. Adam Lockhart shared a list of terms collected during the day:

Reinterpretation, interpretation, Reimagining, Simulation, emulation, new version, regenerative, reenacting, remediation, retransmission, homage, parody, inspiration, recreation, remake, remix, reactionisation, reactualisation, illustration, resonance, tribute, shadow, recycle, retrace.

Furthermore, the origin is confronted with the rhizome: What happens if we open the constellation thinking more about circular history than linearity?

It is concluded that a closer look into the politics of preservation should also be addressed when talking about re-interpretation. The importance and influence of institutional protocols is important when talking about re-interpretation and its relation to notions such as the author, the original, or the ethics of preservation.

From a practical perspective, it is proposed that we create a shared bank of texts and sources and a more direct way to talk between all the participants of the network. Additionally, a few questions will be sent to all the components of the network to start compiling material for further research.

### **Skype with Adad Hannah**

The Q&A with artist Adad Hannah (via Skype, led by Gaby) began with a consideration of Adad's use of the term 're-make' in the title of his adaptation of Dan Graham's *Performer/Audience/Mirror*. (Adad's piece is entitled *Performer/Audience/Re-make*). Adad remarked that his practice is concerned with what happens to artworks in the course of their circulation, through their being subjected to the various operations of "historical agents." In particular, Adad is concerned with cleaving open a space for the viewer to "think more" inside the work: his techniques of making the performances very slow, and of not including sound (it is "too distracting"), are intended to have the effect of making the viewer conscious of his/her active relationality with the work.

Responding to Gaby's question as to whether he thinks of his works as "homages" to the works on which they are based, Adad remarks that the perceptual 'entry point' that his works create—and the form of active spectatorship that follows from this—doesn't depend so much on the specific contents of the 'original' work. He adds that one of the privileges of being an artist is that one doesn't need to consider issues of preservation; this, rather, is the preoccupation of institutes like LIMA. He also comments that, while artists and curators tend to like 'mediating' works for the viewer, he prefers to spend time with the work itself to create a space for generating his own interpretations. Adad underscores the need to remind oneself that one is an "active participant" as a viewer. Correlating with these observations is Adad's observation that there is a danger that such practices could be "too didactic": he sees his strategy of creating a 'point of entry' as a way of avoiding this. Some questions we might ask: Could we see Adad's re-makes as commentaries on the reception, rather than production (or reproduction) of artworks? In the temporal relations that they articulate, do his works

suggest the delimitations of a space that interpretation, as a form of active spectatorship, needs in order to take place? And could the imperative to preserve in fact diminish the perceptual latitude that spectators need (or have, or should have) to creatively interpret artworks?

### *Evening Session - Public Program*

#### **Annet Dekker**

Annet Dekker based her investigation of storytelling as a means of navigating archived material on two case studies. First, she recounted the ways in which archived Geocities webpages were deployed by artists Olia Lialina and Dragon Espenschied. She related such strategies of preserving online cultures to storytelling techniques. Her second case study, of selected works by artist Erica Scourti (“The Outage” (2014) and “The Dark Archive” (2016?)), revealed dimensions of automated online archiving that exceed the subject of the archive’s own memory: as a result of this excess, the archive in turn becomes a site for the re-interpretation of everyday life through the production of new narratives; Scourti deploys narrative techniques to make sense of her online data. The question remains: How can storytelling be used as a strategy for preservation? Further investigation of the efficacies of such an approach would appeal to disciplines like archeology, oral history, and ethnography, in which the analysis of storytelling has a more firmly established status as a research method.

#### **Manuel Pelmus**

Artist Manuel Pelmus started his key lecture by first presenting photographic documentation of his and Alexandra Piricci’s work *Public Collection of Modern Art* (2014). In this series of works, the bodies of the performers enact choreographic “interpretations” of pre-existing artworks (such as Doris Salcedo’s *Shibboleth* and Pablo Picasso’s *Guernica*). Pelmus emphasized the ongoing nature of these pieces: “You don’t have a beginning or end, and people can arrive whenever they want. You weren’t locked in by linearity and you can test and play with temporality, and more modality.” He highlighted aspects of his work such as time, embodiment, memory, history, or the condition of performance under ‘economy of attention’ and presence. For Pelmus, we have moved to a different economy, from an industrial economy towards one based on a more abstract value—that is, an immaterial economy. Here, Pelmus shortly discussed the idea of ‘embodied history’ in which the living body is examined as a subject-object. Furthermore, Pelmus stated that: “interpretation always means production;” in other words, interpretation always presupposes a kind of change. Continuing on that line of thought, Pelmus used one of his most recent works as a final example: *National Museum* (2015), an ongoing action, commissioned by the Kiev Biennale. The piece presents an enactment of sign language interpreter Natalya Dmytruk’s intervention and refusal to translate the official script during a live broadcast on the Ukrainian state-run television channel UT-1, on November 24th, 2004. In Pelmus words, he proposed “the enactment of this ‘public intervention’ from recent history to become part of the museum’s collection/display, in the form of an embodied action that functions like a sculpture. An embodiment that recalls a silent, but powerful gesture, performed in the language of a minority, which offers, in my view, a very different narrative of power and struggle than the prevailing mainstream, male-triumphalist approach to politics and society in general.” The performance took place in front of a large unnamed historical painting in Kiev’s national art museum: the performer’s presence before the historical painting juxtaposes her act with the historical painting’s connotations of male heroes at war, and its narration of a specific kind of Ukrainian national valiance.

#### **Sarah Cook & Adam Lockhart**



Sarah Cook begins with a problem faced by art museums when confronted with works made of “couscous” or “thin air”: who bears responsibility for the work’s preservation strategies? A theoretical frame may be effected around the notion (borrowed from Hanna Hölling) that all artworks could be conceived of as temporal objects, inhabiting specific “relative durations.” (Cook also elicits Hölling’s notion of “permanent impermanence.”) Two more keywords are elicited from Domenico Quaranta’s article “Lost in Translation”: ‘fidelity’ and ‘transparency’. ‘Fidelity’ is acknowledged as being an extremely relative term; ‘transparency’ in this case is concerned with sharing information regarding the artwork’s material transformations at the hands of the various institutions it has passed through—moreover, transparency is of particular significance in being “maybe the only thing we can actually control.” Cook poses the question: How can we negotiate preservation strategies with regard to these principles? Her talk ends with the proposition that our focus on our ability to archive may be working to eclipse our ability to evaluate. Furthermore, she exposes different questions for further research: how much should audience be aware that the reinterpreted work of art differs from its original state? To whom does the newly reinterpreted work belong? The reinterpreter, or the viewer? Is reinterpretation too materially focused as a strategy for works of art that are inherently conceptual, or remain deliberately unfinished or are everchanging?

Adam Lockhart recounts his work with video artist David Critchley, discussing in particular the various transformations and reworkings of the latter’s video work *Pieces I Never Did*, first made in 1979. In the mid-1980s, Critchley destroyed all the work that he had made up to that point. Remaking the work c.2008, Critchley and Farnsworth worked with footage held in various archives (thus escaping the artist’s destructive enterprise) and consulted the artist’s earlier notes on the lost project. Several questions are raised: to what extent are the re-interpretations of archived material that inform this remake a form of preservation?