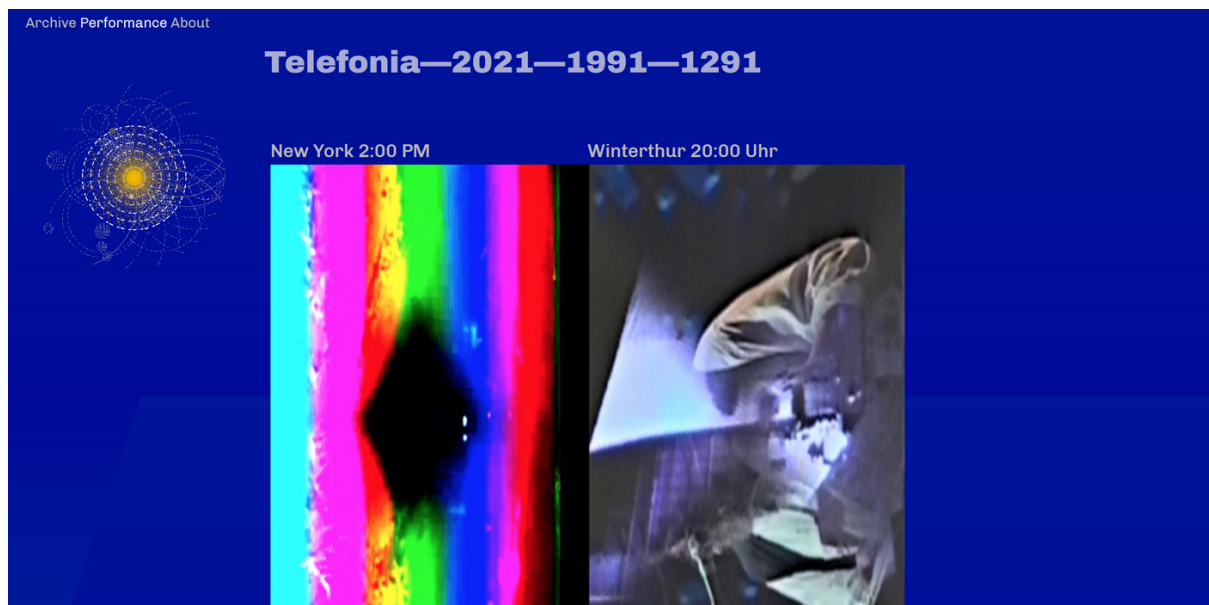


**Summary Workshop Documentation Digital Art with HEK**  
**Wednesday 24 March, 18h00 - 19h30 CET**  
**Transformation Digital Art Symposium**  
**Summary by Manique Hendricks**

Workshop Documentation Digital Art with Haus der Elektronischen Künste with contributions by Andres Bosshard (Artist), Ellen Kotthaus (Conservator, HEK) and Claudia Röck (Conservator, HEK). Moderated by Gaby Wijers (LIMA).

In this series of workshops, part of Transformation Digital Art Symposium 2021, LIMA aims to share experiences and research as well as discuss strategies for the documentation of digital art for and by artists, curators and conservators. Colleagues from Haus der Elektronischen Künste (HEK), Basel, Centre Pompidou Paris, Museum of Modern Art San Francisco (SF MOMA), present and discuss documentation case studies of digital artworks from their own practice. In looking at different types of artworks, a number of problems and/or practices are identified and analysed from an institutional perspective



<http://telefonica.hek.ch>

**Case Study *Telefonia* (1991) by Andres Bosshard**

*Telefonia* by Swiss sound artist Andres Bosshard was a telematic event connecting performances in Winterthur, Säntis and New York in 1991. The occasion for the three day simultaneous concert was the 700 year anniversary of the founding of Switzerland in 1291. *Telefonia* was powered by a constellation of three communication broadcast systems, linking the three performance cites by telephone, by a four wire radio broadcast line and by a, at that time brand new, two megabit teleconference satellite link. During the three days of the telefonia performance, the communication density would change according to the telefonia schedule, accelerating and slowing down the stream of data, generating an electronic tidal cycle.

The archive material of *Telefonia* was acquired by HEK in 2018. The documentation of *Telefonia–1291–1991–2021* was realized in collaboration with the artist in 2020 as a website with text, audio and video documents.

When the artist came to HEK in 2019 for the acquisition he brought along a pile of historical material; videotapes, CD's, photographs and documents. This rich documentary material constituted the legacy of the performance in 1991. The team had to find a way to make the artwork accessible again and wanted to make the historical material publicly available but also stay close to the happening in 1991, trying to capture the essence of the performance.

There is no standard solution to the documentation and preservation of media art, this is also how the process with *Telefonia* was experienced by HEK. Andres Bosshard and a mixed team of his and HEK's collaborators transformed the legacy of past live performances to a fluid online archive. This form of documentation fits seamlessly into the pioneering network spirit of the original *Telefonia* happening in 1991. The conservation strategy HEK used for *Telefonia* is based on digitizing and archiving historical data on the one hand, and ensuring public access to the documentation on the other hand.

*The website Telefonia Archive -1291-1991-2021- consists of two parts: a static and a fluid archive. The Telefonia performance from 1991 is transformed into a fluid archive, an ongoing 9-hour media stream. It enables an immersion into a newly developed generative sound and video composition, which Bosshard has realized based on the historical material. The performance of the fluid Telefonia-archive is always active, it runs on the timeline that started with the Telefonia event on 30.05.1991 at 00.00 am in New York and – with a 6 hour time difference – at 06.00 am in Winterthur. The stream is continually generated from elements of original u-Matic and VHS recordings of the historical performance. Fragments of videos, photographs, texts and other documents, selected by the artist, of the three 24 hour cycles of the original Telefonia performance generate an always changing constellation of emotional memories. Visitors of the website will hear the artist's voice explaining the performance, the internet then and now, different locations and meaning.*

In the static online archive you will find biographies of the team of participating artists, documents of their self-developed hybrid or traditional instruments, videos of the three-day performance in full length, maps and scores of the media network, artists statements, or press reviews.

According to Andres Bosshard, during the live performance in 1991, not all the technical parameters were under control. The performance and its setup were very experimental. While the live performance in 1991 was improvised due to these unpredictable circumstances, the fluid archive performance is not improvised, although it is a new generative composition, a media mobile, made of archival material.

### **What should we remember about the work?**

According to the artist, Andres Bosshard, *Telefonia* was a social project about cooperation, disconnection, and trying to get together over big distances. It was a project about overcoming the limits of time and space. Not using technology to produce art but to collaborate within the unknown sphere that was still analog but on the edge of digital connection. There was no internet yet as we know it today. It was a hybrid network of six

telephone ground lines, four analog radio lines, and a video link via satellite. The impact of visual remote images would disturb and interrupt us, all visual information was not able to give us coherent orientation. The instantly created acoustic space was a new immersive sensation.

### **What about the work should we carry into the future through documentation?**

Most of the transmitted audiovisual data of the performance in 1991 is now active online, supplemented with many explanations and anecdotes to put the data in context. It's not only about the visual presentation but the oral presentation according to artist Andres Bosshard. The big difference for the artist was; "in 1991 I took part in the work as an active artist and I could not experience everything that was happening at that time. Now I could see and hear everything we had achieved in 1991, which was really emotional to me. It was like another continent. I could see details from my colleagues and friends. It was a reconnection with these friends, a really emotional moment. I missed a lot in 1991, that I could now rediscover. I could recreate the emotions that were stored within this tape. That is why it is so important to make such an archive, it keeps these emotions present. [...] The archive of the work now functions as a time capsule. "

### **The importance of communicating the 'emotion' of the past - how do we do this?**

#### **What are the things we need to make present from the documents to communicate emotion?**

"It's like going to a graveyard and reading the data. I was really careful not to let my emotions take over. I wanted to let the music and the colours speak for themselves. I have made space for different emotions, I wanted to have social space for emotions. I'm happy with the colors, the horizon disappears and appears. I consider this an artwork in itself. The screen begins to talk to you and you can interact with it, which is not normally the case with a screen.[...] I'm a media artist not just using the media. I want to break the code. I thought I hacked the screen. For me this is an emotional way to hack it, not by computing but by listening and looking at it."

### **How might the use of a collaborative inter institutional platform allow us and others to collaboratively work with documentation?**

For the artist the collaboration was artistically very interesting. There was no musical interaction, but it was about visualizing things and planning. There was a mix of published tv fragments, structured through the ears of the musician. It's not what we wanted to do now with the archive. The archive is an open situation. It's more like a mindscape according to the artist.

Andres Bosshard said: "The archive becomes a new platform, which reshapes and redefines the performance and collaboration from 1991. I use my composition to bring all the different materials in there to come alive. Maybe It's more like making an ongoing exhibition."

### **What are the problems in documenting digital art? How can we improve on common practice?**

HEK's Wiki documents HEK's artserver and artworks hosted on it. It is a work tool, not meant for publishing. Its structure is organically grown. If you would want to make it public, it needs to be well structured, quickly findable and the writing on a publishing level. In reality there is often little time for structuring, the web server and artworks are ever evolving, there are

several contributors, quickly jotted down notes, confidential data, notes for different audiences that are not always self-explanatory and are often not double-checked for correctness. How do we deal with such a Wiki?

### **What kind of documentation do we need now and in the future to understand the work, how the work functions or functioned in the past?**

HEK used DokuWiki to document the website and documentation of *Telefonia*. The Docuwiki is not publicly accessible and only for internal use. The conservator and programmer used the DokuWiki to document the *Telefonia* website and integrated the text and website from the artist. The wiki lists the most important corner points of the performance project: it documents the website, the artist's ideas, source material, and how the source material is archived. The documentation on the DokuWiki contains sketches of the website from the artist, the colour concept, the chronology of the website development and the documentation of programming parameters and logic. Usually you don't have this information when you preserve a website, it's really nice to have.

### **What can we learn from the documentation and preservation of performance?**

If you want to preserve a performance, you have to feel the spirit of the event as good as you can and then find an individual, creative way to make it accessible again. To keep the authenticity, a collaboration with the artist is necessary.

### **How does audience-generated documentation become part of the documentation of the work?**

Users may have different experiences on different web browsers. Can the *Telefonia* website be experienced in different browsers? According to HEK there are no recordings of that yet: "We usually ask the artists if they have a preference for a web browser". According to Andres Bosshard they checked on different devices like tablets or mobile phones whether the website is presented correctly. The *Telefonia* website was not made for a specific browser,."

To integrate user feedback in the growing archive would be interesting for the future according to Andres Bosshard .

### **What is missing in our documentation?**

*Telefonia* is documented much better than other artworks. There's not always such an extensive collaboration with the artist, which is the case for *Telefonia*. But still not everything is covered in the documentation of the performance and the website. According to the HEK team, documentation is never 'perfect' because there is a lot changing all the time. Does perfect mean complete? Is documentation ever complete?