

First Network Meeting

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UNFOLD: Mediation by Re-interpretation is a research project by LIMA aiming to examine reinterpretation for the preservation and documentation of media art, and draws on the practice of producing a reinterpretation of works by The Vasulkas by the Dutch artist Joost Rekveld. It is remarkable how the potential and consequences of reinterpretation have been rarely addressed when debating on media art mediation, transmission and preservation. The intention of this first multidisciplinary network meeting on mediation, re-mediation, re-enactment and reinterpretation of media art is to open up a debate to contextualise and define the paradigms of reinterpretation as a preservation strategy.

On the 6th June 2016 *UNFOLD: Mediation by Re-interpretation* organised its first network meeting. Here, by bringing together international professionals, curators, artists and scholars, the main goal of this Network Meeting is to provide greater insight into the challenges related to conserving media art beyond the technology and ultimately create a consortium to formulate a collaborative, international project to work on further research on this topic. The day is organized by a morning session that revolves around a main question: *What do reinterpretation, re-mediation, and re-transmission add to our knowledge of a work?* Such a concern is explored by short presentations prepared by some of the participants, which will bring together the experiences of the different disciplines invited. The afternoon session is dedicated to explore different examples of reinterpretation in performance and digital art. The main aim is to detect common characteristics within the different examples to start shaping a preliminary description of the word reinterpretation within the UNFOLD project.

The session starts with a welcoming and short presentation by the director of LIMA and of the program Gaby Wijers and Art theorist and UNFOLD researcher Lara Garcia Diaz. Through the presentation, it is highlighted how digital art or media art, live art and performances are different among other art genres in that they are dependent upon the practices, not the objects, and upon the performative role of the spectator, which is experienced through media, browsers, networks, documentation and storage media. Indeed, since the mid 1990s, the ephemerality and immateriality of many of these time-based works have demanded the configuration of a new set of techniques to ensure their future transmission. During the presentation, words such as emulation, migration, remediation are cited, highlighting the necessity of finding a new vocabulary when talking about further preservation and documentation strategies.

Here, the attention to other disciplines such as music, theater or dance, which have ensured their transmission and preservation by performative live acts, is put into relevance and helps to open one main and common concern: Could we find a method in which the liveness of a particular piece signifies its point of entrance?

Here, the discussion turns afterwards around the important role of the audience. To what extent and how could the audience be used as a methodology to unpack the liveness of an event or documentation? Indeed, the audience is constantly documenting an event. In the case of music, for

example, the audience has ensured the preservation of a specific piece through, for example, oral exchange.

It is also important to take in consideration how music uses score and notation to assure its preservation. For clarification, *Score* is a common alternative term for sheet music, and can also refer to theatre music, orchestral music or songs written for a play, musical, opera, ballet, or to music or songs written for a television programme or film. Music notation is any system used to visually represent aurally perceived music played with instruments or sung by the human voice through the use of written, printed, or otherwise-produced symbols.

How do we mediate to future generations what we do now? Which role should the artist play on the willingness to understand the liveness of his/her/their piece of art? When deepening into the experience of a specific piece rather than a final object to exhibit, which specific code or text would be needed to translate media or digital art? Which are the parameters for a specific piece? How to concentrate in the abstraction of an experience? In the case of theatre, one could say that the word has been its mode of transmission and preservation. In the case of dance or performance, the embodiment has played an important role. But what is the 'word' in Digital art? Or how to detect the live act and preserve it?

The importance of the context could perhaps be a point of entrance of many of these questions. How to keep the liveness of a piece in different contexts? Here, the discussion turns into the importance and barriers that censorship has brought within. While in Youtube we can see a lot of remix and video sampling, we cannot talk yet about restaging performance art or conceptual art.

From a practical perspective, artist Joost Rekveld questions in his presentation till which extend a reinterpretation would be just an aesthetic copy or an inspiration of the original piece. Till which extend is the context really important? Or is it just the sensorial experience what counts? Once more, Joost proposes how in theatre you reproduce words, but what is that we are reinterpreting if we concentrate on digital art pieces such as the ones produced by The Vasulkas? Could we concentrate on the *perception of a spatial experience*? What if we take a Score with different means? What if we record a walk and we reinterpret that same walk? Could we work here with the memory of space, demonstrating different ways of perceiving?

Rekveld informs us about the two pieces he is thinking of reinterpreting. 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 one 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. Thereafter, Rekveld has chosen as a point of entrance the importance of the perception of space to proceed with a Reinterpretation of those two pieces. Kristin Scheving, head of the Vasulka's chamber in Reykjavik (Iceland), gets into the debate via Skype. Rekveld uses the opportunity to highlight how important it would be for him to find direct documentation left by the Vasulka about those two pieces. In that sense, Scheving will send Rekveld some texts and will try to organize a skype call between the Vasulka, based now in Santa Fe (México) and Rekveld in Amsterdam (Netherlands).

Scheving also uses the opportunity to explain how the Vasulka's chamber is being a challenging project, receiving lots of Vasulka's personal documents and the 80% of their digital work. The chamber opened on October 2014 and it is still an ongoing archival project, receiving lots of material from America ever since.

Right after, dancer and choreographer Suzan Tunca uses her introduction to present the current research conducted at the ICK Amsterdam, which concentrates on dance, documentation, notation and transfer. How to use documentation and notation as instruments for generating research trajectories and new knowledges in relation to the range of different artistic signatures present at ICK? Tunca argues how an interdisciplinary research team was used to explore issues of reproduction and authenticity and new systems of notation in relation to different dance idioms. This specific team used documentary filmmaking, existing dance notation systems, interactive media design, gesture analysis and insights from cognition studies. How to implement the findings and results of dance research involving digital media within other fields? Which kind of information is derived from the process of dance transmission? Moreover, she presents different case studies to focus on documentation models. First, she shows the work done in the documentation of *Extra Dry* in which Gaby Wijers, Annet Dekker and Vivian van Saaze explored the possibilities of developing a generic documentation model for restaging contemporary dance by drawing from their experiences in the preservation, documentation and knowledge transfer of media art.

What do we need to know in order to be able to recreate, re- perform, or in other ways, bring the performance piece into the future? The key objective of the research team was to develop a methodology that allows gaining insight into artistic reasoning in such a way that it provides future dancers, choreographers and researchers an understanding of their work. Indeed, documentation and notation are understood here as instruments for generating research trajectories and new knowledges in relation to the range of different artistic signatures present at ICK (from 2016 onwards). The second case study presented by Tunca is the documentation of “Swan Lake” by Jakob Ahlbom. In it, she exposes how they developed the documentation model towards being a better guide through application in practice. Moreover, the research team investigated how the practice of documentation can both derive from and feed back into the practice. Their aim in this case was to develop an instrument for knowledge generation, focused around “intuition” and “intuitive body” as keywords, in addition to the already established keywords “intention” and “creative process”.

Concentrating on pre-choreographic elements, which are the roots of the choreographic statements, Tunca states how live annotation is used to, from one side, strengthening and deepening the dancer’s ability to embody the artistic signature of eg|pc, while from the other side, it further explores the creative potential of the pre-choreographic elements through improvisation. Tunca also explores in her presentation the “intuitive body” as a complement to the “conceptual body” and the “virtuous body” as they appeared throughout the course of dance history. Here, she asks, how can we transpose the quest for the “intuitive body” as a choice of perspective and/or research focus also for the documentation of visiting artists, and as the general departure point for a further investigation into the language of the dancing body? How does the “intuitive body” relate to “the body in revolt”? What are possible theoretical or scientific points of entry towards the type of knowledge that is called “intuitive”? How do these theoretical approaches to intuition relate to the “intuitive body”? How can we make the “intuitive body” and the “body in revolt” more explicit by documenting both: new creations of visiting artists and the pre-choreographic elements practical and theoretical research?

From a musicological perspective, composer, performer and radio artist Elisabeth Schimana focuses in the ephemeral quality of music. For Schimana, Score is a tool of communication and, in this case, music has always followed an oral tradition for its mediation and transmission. Important to say is that such a transmission has been always done by practice. That is, by doing it -through the culture of doing: what keeps alive a score is the community that brings it alive. Departing from that point, Schimana proposes the moment of recreation as a creative act, as, in her opinion, any time one performs a piece is a recreation. Compositions with live electronics have been a major part of the catalogue of works by Schimana, and therefore, she is very interested in the sentient hearing of the performer into the controlling instrument of formation. In the Virus series, for example, she developed

a specific method to communicate with musicians. As a listener, and not as a writing composer of electronic music, she works with the medium sound in opposite to the medium writing/image. For Schimana, Live generated electronic sound is the score for the musicians. Each musician forms a duo with a loudspeaker and has the order to play as precise as possible on the instrument that she or he is hearing. The audience is listening to both – the score and the interpretation. In this case, the score is clearly generated live. However, it is important to notice that for Schimana this *modus operandi* does not involve improvisation but rather intuition and liveness.

Reinterpretation is thus at this stage primarily understood as a creative act. As Schimana argues, there is always something written by an artist that is afterwards taken and revisited by another artist, changing it, and therefore, ‘reinterpreting’ the piece. During the debate, however, it is difficult to obviate the necessity of finding a new vocabulary. The urgency to compare, find and take terms from other disciplines becomes highly necessary when discussing about alternative modes of mediation, transmission and preservation of media and digital art. For other disciplines such as Theater, for example, the word *reconstruction*, which was introduced by German scholar Max Hermann (1865-1942), the founder of modern European theater studies, demands a detailed research of evidence and documentation of the past in order for the historian to proceed with a perfect reconstruction. Herman’s approaches were essentially philological and art historical in nature. From a contemporary perspective, nonetheless, it quite seems to lead again to a common problematic: How can ephemeral phenomena of the past be captured and rendered suitable for aesthetic study? What documents should historians draw and how should they be studied? Perhaps also interesting to take in consideration the procedure of *theatrical adaptations* in which material from another artistic medium, such as a novel or a film is re-written according to the needs and requirements of the theater and turned into a play or musical.

In another discipline such as music, an *arrangement* is a musical reconceptualization of a previously composed work. It may differ from the original work by means of reharmonization, melodic paraphrasing, orchestration, or development of the formal structure. When looking into visual arts, the words *appropriation*, *rewriting*, *reframing* and *reconnection* pop up in the debate but still seem to also be insufficient to proceed with a common definition. From a curatorial perspective, we could also talk about the reinterpretation of exhibitions. Here, we could talk about the conservation of ethics, related to the artist intend. Till which extend is the museum also reinterpreting pieces of art when using specific curatorial solutions or exhibition configurations? Can the museum take that liberty? What is the inner action? What are the important elements to take in consideration?

Could we talk about the *actualization* of a specific piece? How important is the media or the machinery used? If one thing seems to be shared by all the members of the meeting is the necessity to look into reinterpretation as a creative act rather than as an actualization of software and hardware. Can the creative act be used as a method? What if we treat mediation as an environment or as a process?

The role of documentation appears once more during the debate as a relevant concern shared by all the different disciplines attending the meeting. Indeed, we have already seen at this point how documentation plays different roles in visual arts than in theater or music. And yet, the importance of the parameters, that is the scale of how much the artist can deviate from the original piece when reinterpreting, is a common concern.

Professor in new media and performance studies Gabriella Giannachi, in that sense, proposes to use the archive as a map and the performance as a way of practicing the archive. By using different case

studies, she argues how performance, documentation and the archive should not so much be looked at as a chronology, on a linear timeline, but as a series of folds. Preservation of a dimension of this fold will not help us in understanding what is happening between the folds. For this we need to participate in facilitating the act of unfolding. Moreover, she analyses the archive, the apparatus through which we map the everyday, as a mode to unwrap the document into performance and vice versa, making a document out of performance by unfolding one into the other. In her own words, “mediation, re-mediation, re-enactment and re-interpretation are our methods to do this and operate ‘at the limit of the living present’.”

The afternoon session is used to screen 2 video-examples from the LIMA collection chosen by Gaby Wijers. The different examples, two ‘reinterpretations’ of Dan Graham’s *Performer Audience Mirror* (1975) and two ‘reinterpretations’ of Vito Acconci’s *Walk Over (Indirect Approaches)* (1973), are used to collectively identify common characteristics between the different works that could lead to a preliminary contextualization of the notion of reinterpretation.

The first video screened is *Performance Audience Remake* by Adad Hannah (2008), followed by *Performance Audience Fuckoff* by Forsyth & Pollard (2009). These two works are explored as Reinterpretation of Graham’s *Performer Audience Mirror* and it is curious how each of the participants of the debate emphasize different aspects of the videos. While some are really interested in the use of the mirror, the use of text –used as a feed-back and as a feed-forth- and the cameramen, others are very much interested in the embodiment of the artist. Indeed, Adad Hannah seems to concentrate on the still-ness of Dan Graham’s piece. The exploration that Graham proposes is reinterpreted by Hannah in different body positions that evolve during the time of his performance. It is also interesting how Hannah seems to play with the expectations of the re-enactment. Here, Forsyth & Pollard’s piece seems to reinterpret Graham’s performance as a stand up British comedy, that is, very acted. Thereafter, what should be reinterpreted? Should we concentrate in the performer? The text? The audience? In the first example Hannah proposes a reinterpretation that stretches time via the performative action, while in the second example, Forsyth & Pollard reinterpret the text. What seems common, however, it is the reinterpretation of the aesthetics proposed by Graham. The mirror, the audience, the camera-men and the position of the performer.

When talking about Vito Acconci’s reinterpretation, the space also plays an important role. The idea of the corridor is emphasized in each of the examples. But what would happen if we place the same text in a complete different space? Would we then lose the direct reference to the original piece? Till which extend the parallelisation of the space is important in a posterior reinterpretation? Which would be the reframing or the reconnection with the original piece when talking about reinterpretation? And how that Reinterpretation would be presented or displayed by an institution such as museum?

Reinterpretation seems to also suggest some new aspects within the process of creation: it is not just about a copy or re-enactment but it is also about going back to the original piece and playing with it, changing it, revisiting it. And yet, is it just the privilege of the artists to proceed with a reinterpretation? Would an institution such as LIMA proceed with a reinterpretation of their archive, or would the institution always be in need of an artist to do so? Gaby Wijers explains how she has seen many reinterpretations of media artworks but primarily done by students in art academies. UNFOLD commissioned a reinterpretation to artist Joost Rekveld to follow the entire process works and in which way the new piece will connect with the original artwork. However, we should also talk about how the museums proceed with reinterpretations or reenactments of exhibitions, or even how the Vasulka have reinterpreted their own work.

Nonetheless, what if we think about conservation ethics, bringing back the artist theoretical and

aesthetic intent? Can a museum take the liberty to not follow that? Here, we have to be aware that, in many occasions, curators or museums display the original piece in many different ways -using a different screen than the one intended by the artist or just projecting the piece... Could that be identified as interpretation or also be identified as a reinterpretation? To what extent are they following the artist original intent? But, what if we direct the same questions to dance or music? Theater, for example, is a practice-based discipline. Of course there is documentation about the setting and staging, but what we have primarily is the text.

Serena Cangiano proposes here to take a moment to reflect on what she presents as research through design. That is, using creativity as a strategy for preserving. Reinterpretation is here extremely related to the making, to the output of the making. Cangiano discusses to combine reinterpretation with the act of creating new things in terms of a method. A reflection. How can reinterpretation be used to mediate a work and in this way preserve it? And why we, as institutions, do not use it so often? For Cangiano, it is crucial to point out how we always think of the piece of art/design as an object. If we stop thinking about the object authorised by the museum or the artist, we perhaps could come up with a process, environment or an interaction and activate the mediation. But this process is constantly changing, which is dangerous but very important. The problem for Cangiano is very much based in the common obsession with the object. Thus, the author of the piece, the ownership, or the copyright are still very much rooted in the language of preservation. Cangiano uses her presentation to introduce a project that started in 2014 and finished at the end of 2015 titled *Re-programmed Art: An open manifesto*. The title and the conceptual core of the project is inspired from an exhibition named *Arte programmata. Arte cinetica. Opere moltiplicate. Opera aperta* ("Programmed art. Kinetic art. Multiplied works. Open works"), organized by Bruno Munari and Giorgio Soavi and celebrated in 1962 in the Olivetti showroom in Galleria Vittorio Emanuele in Milan. The works by Munari, Enzo Mari, Gruppo T and Gruppo N were featured in the exhibition and the text of the catalogue is by Umberto Eco. Cangiano is interested in this exhibition for their use of what we could nowadays call generative graphics, and their interest on drawing instructions to describe the functioning of those graphics. The pieces of art done by these artists were fragile and they evolved in time. More interestingly, these artists were proposing an artistic research that lead to the idea of 'Art for everyone'. In other words, everyone could do the pieces of art exhibited while using the instructions given by the artist. The art pieces were not signed and, more extremely, they were the artists themselves who asked other artists to reproduce their art pieces. Cangiano proposes hence a main question; how to translate the main principles of programmed art into the codes of contemporary culture? How to preserve (and to tell the history of) programmed art through alternative strategies? Through the project *Reprogrammed Art*, Cangiano and her team envisioned the possibility to resonate with the utopia of Gruppo T about a multiplied art made for everyone and highly reproducible, using the model offered by open source development and the maker culture.

Important to emphasize is how the project used two methods: re-enacting (in my memory so all the time uses the word re-designing?) and open-sourcing. For the first one, re-enacting, the team worked together for one week in the FabLab SUPSI in Lugano, allowing artists and designers to make prototypes that could embed the art pieces of Gruppo T. The group were not just thinking about the materials but they were primarily sketching and drawing the prototypes. The idea was to translate the main objectives of Gruppo T into contemporary prototyping. Indeed, some of the components of Gruppo T were invited to join the workshop to work collectively. All the documentation is nowadays online and all the prototypes done during the workshop are open for everyone. This way of working resonates into the second method, open sourcing the artworks, and open the licenses.

At the end of the workshop, the group arrive to the conclusion that each artist set about translating Gruppo T's artworks into a form that would enable to reproduce, repair or subvert it, in order to elicit reflections on the practices involved in creating visual effects, visualizing physical phenomena and

interactions, manipulating mechanisms and playing with materials and technology. reprogramming is hence not just re-making because every remake based on new technologies and materials entails a radical process of re-design. During the project, the group betrayed the uniqueness and originality of the artwork, but they answered new questions concerning the conservation of artworks that cannot be simply contemplated, but call for active audience participation. Cangiano concludes that through the open making of derivative works, they learn how to liberate the artworks that, once it is part of commons, it is not a case of granting everyone the right to reproduce it, but rather conferring the responsibility to preserve its essence.

We have been able to identify several performances made in the last ten years that have been re-executed, re-enacted, or perhaps reinterpreted. Seems important to highlight, how, within UNFOLD, reinterpretation is identified as a preservation strategy but not as a strategy that preserves primarily the original hardware. During the final debate it is discussed how much more research has been directed to the preservation of hardware without taking in consideration strategies such as reinterpretation. In that sense, within the research done during UNFOLD, we would like to concentrate on the preservation of the liveness, the conceptual aspects, the spatiality etc. of the original piece. Nevertheless, UNFOLD is not stating that the preservation of the hardware is not important but rather that the research conducted within this project is taking another conceptual line. Perhaps it could also be very interesting to question if we can, within the strategy of reinterpretation, somehow also take in consideration the hardware question. Or in other words, how to preserve old machines alive instead of collecting them all as pure objects like for example in the Science Museum in London?

This first meeting concludes on the importance to consider reinterpretation as a strategy able to preserve the immaterial and live qualities of media art or performance. Thereafter, it is proposed to reflect on reinterpretation primarily as a creative act able to incorporate history, memory and unique contextual elements in each of its results. Reinterpretation understood as a mode of mediation and, therefore, transformed into a mode of preservation.