

Third Network Meeting

07/02/2017, Amsterdam

Participants: Fransien Van Der Putt, Claudia Roeck (preservator), Christian Sancto (researcher), Gabriella Giannachi (professor of performance and new media), Elisabeth Schimana, (composer, performer and radio artist), Sander van Maas (musicologist), Gaby Wijers (director of LIMA), Lara Garcia Diaz (art theorist and researcher), Joost Rekveld (artist), Hilde van den Dobbelsteen, Sanneke Stigter (preservator), Jon Ippolito (artist and theorist), Annet Dekker (researcher and curator), Josef Gründler (artist), Vera Sofia Mota (artist).

Starting in March 2016, UNFOLD has already shown some results or processes publically. Joost Rekveld, for example, premiered his work #67 at the International Film Festival Rotterdam 2017; theorist and researcher Gabriella Giannachi wrote a text reflecting about the project and which will be further published in an upcoming Reader; and theorist Lara Garcia Diaz was invited in the symposium *Future Proof?!* to talk about UNFOLD's results. Receiving attention from different peers and institutions, this Network Meeting represents the last opportunity for everyone to come up together and be able to draw the conclusions of this very productive first year. Therefore, and accordingly, the day starts with the presentation of Rekveld's work followed by a collective reflection on its relation with the Vasulka's work. Giannachi follows Rekveld with a reading of her text. This time, the Network Meeting also counts with the participation of artist and theorist Jon Ippolito, from whom this project has learnt so much. Ippolito opens the afternoon session updating the other participants on his research on reinterpretation through *The Variable Media Network*. Lara Garcia Diaz and Christian Sancto take the floor afterwards to present the *Annual Project Review* in which they are both working on. The rest of the afternoon is dedicated to tackling concrete questions and to discussing possible future orientations of UNFOLD.

Joost Rekveld

Joost starts the session screening his video piece #67. When UNFOLD started, Rekveld was invited to select two works by experimental video artist duo Woody & Steina Vasulka to reinterpret: *Telc* (1974) and *Reminiscence* (1974).

After screening the video piece, Rekveld explains that when he was invited to select the works of the Vasulkas "he was already working on sensory interactions and visualization; sensory substitution, new senses and wearable devices" (Joost, 2017). Rekveld's interest in the Vasulkas was very much rooted in their use of a visual abstract landscapes, which can seem unrecognisable at first, and yet, through the incorporation of real sound, the artists create a new spatiotemporal dimension. In Rekveld's mind a question has always pivoted his thoughts: What happens if you have senses that are different than your own ones? Here, Rekveld talks about the notion of reafference, which is the stimulation of an animal as a result of the movements of its own body.

Rekveld also describes his Skype talk with the Vasulkas, and how the genesis of Rekveld's approximation to their work was not so much technically but on the way they worked. The Vasulkas, in that sense, are really meticulous, and all their final videos are a result of small selected bits of hours and hours of recorded material. Furthermore, through Rekveld's conversation with the Vasulkas, the idea of subjective memory came into play: transformation or demonstration of subjective vision. Here, Rekveld points out how Woody Vasulka is currently losing his memory and thus the whole exercise becomes even more intrinsic and subjective.

It is when Rekveld starts to explain the technical decisions that he had to take during the working process when he points out how, thanks to some remarks made by Elisabeth Schimana during the first network meeting, he started using analogue technology. From that point on, Rekveld started to experiment with the Rutt/Etra video synthesiser. In that sense, and by using this kind of synthesiser, Joost was able to better resemble the aesthetics of Vasulkas' video. It was also thanks to the workshop, which took place at LIMA between 29th November to 1st December 2016, that Rekveld experimented first-hand with portable devices; an experiment that aimed to get the same visual aesthetics but in real time. Cristina Kubish was a referent here for Rekveld.

As Rekveld interestingly points out, why did the Vasulkas use the Rutt/Etra synthesiser and investigate those kind of aesthetics? Could we argue that their investigation of space can resemble what today we call virtuality or virtual reality? Rekveld points out here, nonetheless, how his working process started from physicality and digital algorithm or software programming.

Once Rekveld solved all the technical issues, he explains how he started drafting a series of walks. One of them started in a power plant (a symbolic association with the 50Hz drone that, Rekveld says, accompanies urban life below the threshold of ordinary perception) and ended in the nearest metro station. Once there, he took the metro for two stops. He was recording the sound, the electromagnetic waves and the video at the same time.

In that sense, we all agree how although the Vasulkas' work is very much related to memory of space, in Rekveld's case is much more related to his interest on modulating sensorial experience in real time. Moreover, Rekveld points out how he made twenty takes through the machine and how the final video is not an edited video. This is also quite a huge difference compared to Vasulka's work. Moreover, and aesthetically, Rekveld's video images have a circular shape (the artist developed a module especially to achieve this effect), which enhances the way of navigating through the world.

It is through the Q&A that Rekveld makes clear why he has used the word interpretation rather than reinterpretation during his presentation. What is the difference? For Joost the difference is that reinterpretation makes sense in historical art, tradition. When you can go back. That is, when interpretation becomes as something normal for a discipline (theatre, music, in movie perhaps a remake = interpretation of the original). In Rekveld's eyes it is as if we could go outside of somewhere and then go inside it again. What is clear is that Rekveld does not consider his work #67 as a re-enactment or a remake. He moreover points out how he has also understood his approximation as a remediation of biology and a remediation of technology. What is interesting is that what Joost has remediated is not Vasulka's conceptualization but their method of working. In a sense, with his approach, he has continued a kind of tradition, a way of working, taking as a starting point the memory of an environment and the use of analogue video synthesizer.

After all, Rekveld has come up with two results. From one side, he has created the video #67, and from the other, he has programmed the application used in the mobile devices during the workshop. What seems relevant to point out here is how the application has been licenced with copyleft or creative commons, while the video work has been licensed with copyright. Why? Here, Joost argued that the app is for him a result of a process, which he would like to share and exploit while the video piece is an artistic artefact or result. Such a statement makes clear how authorship is of a huge importance for Joost when talking about his art pieces. Indeed, one of the points that UNFOLD necessitates to highlight in future investigation is contemporary approaches of authorship within artistic institutional constraints.

Gabriella Giannachi

Giannachi uses her presentation during this last network meeting to briefly introduce her text titled “At the edge of the ‘living present’: re-enactments and re-interpretations as strategies for the preservation of performance and new media arts.” This text will be presented in a Reader that will be published by Routledge at the end of 2017. The text takes as its main starting point the project UNFOLD and how its reflection on the use of reinterpretation in the context of conservation of media arts. Giannachi reads some parts of the text, clarifying how the term reinterpretation was chosen *vis-à-vis* others, like replay, remediation, restaging and reenactment, “to reflect the fact that works were not simply to be re-performed or re-staged, but also interpreted anew” (Giannachi, 2017). Giannachi also makes clear that “by preservation [she does not] so much mean the conservation of something that occurred in the past, but rather a claim to a ‘living’ quality in the present. [...] Preservation as how a work appeared or react or related to a context” (Giannachi 2017). During her reading, Giannachi exposes how the “capacity of the reenactment to be both original and a reproduction reveals a fundamental aspect of the generation of value in the late 20th and early 21st century, namely the fact that the production process itself is becoming perhaps less important than the often performative accumulation of what could be described as relations” (Giannachi 2017). Indeed, and one of the main conclusions that UNFOLD seeks to point out is how a reinterpretation can never be seen in isolation but in relation between other works. By investigating the relations between different works we can perhaps formulate new questions in the present that help us understand the past but also annunciate a possible future. Here, it is highlighted how History is produced from the present; or as Giannachi points out, “the present as a future past”.

What reinterpretation also brings to the fore, in Giannachi’s eyes, is the questions of what we need to preserve. In that sense, Ippolito opens the Q&A by arguing how if there is a score that score can be interpreted. But what happens when there is no score? Are we then talking about reinterpretation? Furthermore, what is the relation between reinterpretation and reenactment? What is the difference between the two? Reinterpretation seems in this sense to come when the action of reenactment is not possible because there is missing a document or a score. From a preservation point of view it questions where the origin is. Here we could also talk about different contexts and ecologies, different details that are giving information of the whole. In that sense, reinterpretation pays attention to the relation between the parts and the whole. Or are the parts already a whole?

Jon Ippolito

Jon Ippolito used his presentation to go in depth with *The Variable Media Approach* and the project *The Variable Media Approach Initiative*.¹ He points out how during the 1990s conservators were preserving without really taking in consideration the consequences of the media used by the artist. Indeed, it seems a contradiction in a time in which much of the art done was precisely exploring its own medium. And yet, if you don’t save the medium what it is that you preserve? It was in 2013 when the idea of emulation started to become a serious preservation strategy and was adopted by some institutions. In Ippolito’s eyes, it is now in 2017, that reinterpretation seems to be what emulation was in 2013. For Ippolito, it is important to highlight how the interaction we had with technology in the past is very different to the interaction we have nowadays with technology. The paradigms change and it is impossible to emulate an experience. In that sense, he exposes one of the cases of *The Variable Media Approach Initiative*: The Erl King (1982, emulated 2004). In this case, the initiative recreated the installation of 1982 but with new technology. However, the machinery was currently so fast that

¹ The Variable Media Initiative, a nontraditional, new preservation strategy, emerged in 1999 from the museum’s efforts to preserve media-based and performative works in its permanent collection, and later spawned the Variable Media Network (VMN). Initially supported by a grant from the Daniel Langlois Foundation for Art, Science, and Technology in Montreal, Canada, the VMN now comprises a group of international institutions and consultants, including University of Maine, the Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archives, Franklin Furnace, Rhizome.org, and Performance Art Festival & Archives.

they had to put some pause in the new code. A main concern raises then: are we using new machinery but that behaves like the old one? Here Ippolito would answer negatively, because the pause is necessary for the audience to understand what they are doing. Here we are talking about an experience and not about technological recreation.

Moreover, Ippolito highlights the importance of the social impact in what the object is. Here, Ippolito briefly presents his research into indigenous media and their mode of preserving culture. He exposes the case of a Malangan sculpture, and how anthropologist Marilyn Strathern has shown that natives of Papua New Guinea sell that sculpture after a public display, only to destroy it so the new caretaker must have it recreated from memory. For Ippolito, a Malangan figure carved from wood and shells is not nearly as ephemeral as a lamak made of palm leaves—or indeed a website made of HTML and Perl. But each generation re-creates Malangan because they value such "proliferative preservation" as a mechanism for forging bonds among people across clans and generations. Ippolito concludes pointing out the necessity to examine preservation models and traditions in different contexts, detecting its constraints and limitations when it comes to aspects of heritage and ownership.

What he is proposing could be applied within a critical examination of conservation's complex theoretical and methodological approach due to the existence of new artistic processes that, for example, are not built to last and that it is precisely its ephemeral status what frames its conceptual meaning.

Lara Garcia Diaz and Christian Sancto

During their presentation, Garcia and Sancto expose an overview of the work undertaken under the project UNFOLD. They point out how the conceptual framework of the project has proposed conceptualising and practising preservation as an interpretative act in which the hybrid, contextual, or live qualities of the original piece can be captured through its reinterpretation. In that sense, the configuration of different questions and subquestions has been a crucial research method during the development of the project, using the formulation of those as a directional method. Some questions have been answered and some others have led to the configuration of new questions, which moreover, have moved the research initiative to new and unexpected terrains.

Through exposing the concerns from which the initiative started and the theoretical analyses in which the project is embedded now, Garcia and Sancto point out how from the initial question, Can reinterpretation as a creative act be seen as preservation strategy? The initiative has perhaps arrived to the moment in which the question is inversed. That is: can preservation be understood as a creative act and therefore include reinterpretation as one of its strategies? By doing so, they argue, the project can come to realise the importance and influence of institutional protocols when talking about reinterpretation and its relation to notions such as the author, the original, or the ethics of preservation.

It was then suggested that reflections on the process of production of Rekveld's #67 to the issues that had animated the trajectory of UNFOLD might best be oriented around two questions. First: How has the term 'reinterpretation' functioned in the production of the work? In the 'preproduction' stage—Rekveld's selection of works to reinterpret, his discussions of *Telc* and *Reminiscence* with the Vasulkas, the investigations into the technical means by which the Vasulkas produced the works, and the workshop—'reinterpretation' functioned as to guide Rekveld's approach to research. The crystallisation of these efforts in #67 brings back structural similarities with the Vasulkas' pieces: a similar medium and mode of spectatorial engagement; a similar temporal structure, with material recorded on a walk being made subject to later manipulations. In this work, presented as the final

effort of a reinterpetive project, formal parallels with the reinterpreted works seem to index reinterpetation as a method most strongly, at the same time as those similarities bring the differences—in particular Rekveld's concerns with modulated perception—into sharper relief.

The second questions around which reflections on Rekveld's work revolved was: What conclusions about reinterpetation can we draw from Rekveld's project in relation to the question: How might reinterpetation work as a preservation strategy? It was argued that if there is an emergent 'preservationist' ethic in Rekveld's work, it consists in reworking the concerns of earlier works and technologies through contemporary artistic preoccupations. In this case, preservation may have as its object not of discrete works themselves, but an artistic method, approach, or 'way of working'.

Group Discussion

The last two hours of the last network meeting are proposed to discuss, debate and return to open questions that still remain open. In order to address the different questions more accurately, the group is divided into two subgroups, each of five or six people. The first questions addressed are:

1) What do we understand by reinterpetation? Can we agree that Joost's work is a reinterpetation? Why? Which are the factors that make us think so?

Group 1: Group 1 agrees from the very beginning to understand reinterpetation as preservation and as a creative act that always coexists with other works. When tackling Joost's work, the group agrees that it is important to have in mind that this process of reinterpetation has been a commission, and hence, there is an idea of reinterpetation from the very beginning. It is said how, nonetheless, Rekveld doesn't take anything from the Vasulkas and how the Vasulkas didn't leave any code or script for Rekveld in order for him to interpret it. Thereafter, Rekveld was forced to reinterpet. But how much are you allowed to change if that new piece symbolizes a reinterpetation of another work? Here the group also addresses the problems with crediting or 'the ethics of crediting'. The group believes that crediting should be more transparent and not always just point out to the last artist who was producing the art piece. That is, the credits should inform better about the genealogy of relations that the artwork or the creative process is bringing within. It also seems to the group that while interpretation seems more prohibited by law, Reinterpetation is more open... it allows for other ways of preservation and creation.

Group 2: Group 2's discussion followed on from Ippolito's earlier figure of the score as paradigmatic for reinterpetive processes. If we are to consider particular works as reinterpetive, the second group concluded, we should look at its relation to the work it reinterpets as consisting in the *creation* of a 'score', in the form of an 'abstraction' from the original work, which is then elaborated in the reinterpetive work. The group then discussed the ways in which Rekveld made such an abstraction from the Vasulkas' works, and how this informed the process of making the final film.

2) The term reinterpetation was chosen *vis-à-vis* others, like reimagining, regenerative, reenacting, remediation, retransmission, recreation, remake, remix, reactionisation, reactualisation, resonance, recycle, retrace, restaging, reperfomed. How do we position reinterpetation within these terms? Why are we talking about reinterpetation when talking about Joost's work and not reenacting?

Group 1: the group agrees here in pairing the different words into categories in order to have a clearer view on which terms are closer to Reinterpetation and which others are further. Here Remixing is paired with Recycling or reuse as it refers to new material and implies reordering the components or

adding new components. Remake is paired with rewriting and reproduction as it reminds to the idea of copy or reboot. Restaging is paired with re-enactment and reperformance as it suggests the activation of a historical artefact from the past. Finally, the group agrees to pair Reinterpretation with Interpretation, relating those terms through the discipline of archaeology. Here the prefix Re- from Reinterpretation notes the going back to somewhere non-written yet and hence calls for intervention. Interpretation seems to go back to a source or score, and from there propose an interpretation of that score.

Group 2: Reinterpretation stands out from the other terms listed by designating a creative intervention into a preexisting work in order to generate a new work. One component of such an intervention (with reference to the group's response to the first set of questions) is a process of 'abstraction' from an earlier work; and this in turn implies the carrying out of research into how the original work was made, what aesthetic and theoretical issues pertained to its creation, and so on.

3) How important is the original intent?

Group 1: the group starts the discussion by proposing another question; what if the artist never said anything about his/her intent? What if we do not know anything about it? It becomes also important for the group to differentiate between the intent in the meaning and the intent for the piece's preservation. While asking what the artist intent is for both the meaning and the preservation, various historical motivations can also come at the front. With strategies such as Reinterpretation, and with questions such as this one, it makes clear how artists should be more aware in the necessity to document everything and if it is not the artist, then the parties that are involved in the exhibition process or its presentation and future preservation. Overall, artist intend matters, but how can we get to know it? How should artists' practice change in order for Reinterpretation to really take in consideration the artists' intend?

Group 2: The group concluded that the intentions the artist had in creating the preexisting work (if these were ever clearly laid out) are one among many other elements to be negotiated in processes of reinterpretation. Importantly, the value of a reinterpreive work should not be measured solely by its degree of fidelity to or digression from what the first artist intended in making his/her work. The way in which Joost brought his own artistic preoccupations to bear on the Vasulkas' works elicited attention to aspects of the latter that might or might not have been explicitly articulated concerns of the Vasulkas—Joost's preeminent concern with perception rather than memory, for example. Reinterpretation can be a creative act not only by the fact of producing a new work, but also by suggesting new ways of seeing earlier works.

Future

The participants of the last network meeting of UNFOLD conclude by agreeing on the necessity to address the role, function or way of working of institutions. How would an art institution need to change in order to embrace Reinterpretation? Here, everyone agrees that further collaboration with art schools and museums would be necessary. Moreover, it would be an idea to think about a deeper collaboration between artists and museums and propose the project UNFOLD as a mode to

open/activate museum's archive and collections. Here it is also suggested to not just approach the preservation department in museums but also the education department. In that sense, and if the project is rephrased as a process to activate the collection, more funders and partners could perhaps be interested. It is important to also think about working with collectors. Really important would also be to configure a solid team of partners and people.

To end up this year, an *Annual Project Review* will be written and a manifesto will be configured in order for LIMA to send it to possible new partners and funders. Here, Reinterpretation can also be 'sold' as a way to involve new publics and, as argued above, to activate collections and archives.

see UNFOLD manifesto