UNFOLD:
Mediation by Re-interpretation

Annual Project Review Report
March 2016 - March 2017

LIMA

M
mondriaan
fund

creative
industries
fund NL

www.li-ma.nl

What are the par adigms of the preser vation of an artwork of ephemer al natur e?

How is reinte rpretation understood by and practised in other disc iplines such as theatre, music or dance ? And which position a nd role do documentation have in these processes ?

Can media art be mediated and preserved by reinterpretation?

CAN REINTERPRET ATION AS CREATIVE ACT BE SEEN AS PRESERVATION STRATEGY?

u n

How wou ld notions su ch as authenticity or aut horship be affected by using reinterpre tation as a transmission a nd mediation strategy for media art ?

Until which extent must reinterpr etation be warranted by the origin al artist?

Should we encour age reinterpr etation to be broadly accepted in me dia art's mediation, tr ansmission a nd preservation?

Which methodology should be used to integr ate reinterpretation as a mo de of preservation within institutions su ch as LIMA?

f o l d

This project would not have been possible without the participation of...

Vera Sofia Mota (Artist), Fransien Van Der Putt (Dramaturg, Radio Artist and Researcher), Suzanne Tuncha (Dancer and Researcher Choreographer ICK), Britte Sloothaak (Assistant Curator SMA), Serena Cangiano (Curator and Researcher SUPS), Gabriella Giannachi (Professor in Performance and New Media, university of Exeter), Elisabeth Schimana (Composer, Performer and Radio Artist, IMA), Sander van Maas (Musicologist), Gaby Wijers (Director of LIMA), Kristin Scheving (Coordinator Vasulka Chamber, visual artists and curator), Joost Rekveld (Artist), The Vasulkas (Artists), Maura Favero (Art Historian), Vivian van Saaze (Assistant Professor and Managing Director of the Maastricht Centre for Arts and Culture, Conservation and Heritage), Claudia Roeck (Conservator), Katja Kwastek (Professor of Art History VU), Adad Hannah (Artist), Christian Sancto (Researcher), Emma Panza (Curator), Karin de Wild (Art Historian and Researcher), Adam Lockhart (Art Historian and Conservator), Martine Neddam (Artist), Sarah Cook (Art Historian, Curator and Researcher University of Dundee), Annet Dekker (Assistant Professor of Media Studies: Archival Science UvA), Hilde van den Dobbelsteen (LIMA), Maaike Bleeker (Professor in Performance and Media, UU), Jan Robert Leegte (Artist), Sanneke Stigter (Assistant Professor in Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Heritage at the UvA), Jon Ippolito (Artist and Theorist), Josef Gründler (Artist), Manuel Pelmus (Artist)

From here we would like to deeply thank them all

Gaby Wijers, Lara Garcia Diaz and Christian Sancto
Amsterdam, 28th March 2017

Table of Contents

1

UNFOLD:
Mediation by Re-interpretation

Introduction

UNFOLD: Mediation by Re-interpretation is a research project organized by LIMA, an international platform for sustainable access to media art, aiming to examine reinterpretation as a strategy for the preservation and documentation of media art. The project includes a commissioned reinterpretation of works by pioneering experimental video artists The Vasulkas, Woody Vasulka and Steina, by Dutch artist Joost Rekveld, the result of which was premiered at the International Film Festival Rotterdam in January 2017.

The project's point of departure was a definition of reinterpretation presented in *Permanence Through Change: The Variable Media Approach*, which in turn resulted from the research undertaken under the project *The Variable Media Initiative*. Thanks to this groundbreaking project, a flexible approach to the preservation of a range of creative practices was introduced and the notion of variable media started to be taken seriously. The project introduced a whole new vocabulary, opening up and challenging traditional notions of preservation. Within its framework, reinterpretation is defined as "the most radical preservation strategy" as it implies "reinterpret[ing] the work each time it is re-created." For the *Variable Media Initiative*, reinterpretation is "a dangerous technique when not warranted by the artist, but it may be the only way to recreate performed, installed, or networked art designed to vary with context."[1]
Within its framework, reinterpretation is defined as "the most radical preservation strategy" as it implies "reinterpret[ing] the work each time it is re-created." For the *Variable Media Initiative*, reinterpreta-

tion is "a dangerous technique when not warranted by the artist, but it may be the only way to recreate performed, installed, or networked art designed to vary with context."[2]

Taking into consideration the research already undertaken, and by organizing three network meetings, one expert meeting, three public events, and one workshop, the intention with UNFOLD was the configuration of a project that could continue and reinforce a line of research in which the potential and consequences of reinterpretation could be addressed in debates concerning media art mediation, transmission and preservation. In order to do so, we—Gaby Wijers (director of LIMA), Lara Garcia Diaz (researcher), Christian Sancto (assistant researcher) and the entire LIMA team—have brought together international professionals, artists, art curators, archivists, conservators, choreographers, musicologists, and theatre and performance scholars, as well as those whose practices traverse several of these occupations, to provide greater insight into the challenges related to conserving media art beyond the technology, and ultimately to create a consortium to formulate a future collaborative, interdisciplinary and international project to research this topic further.

---

1   *The Variable Media Approach, permanence through change*, book edited by Alain Depocas, Jon Ippolito and Caitlin Jones (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 2003):128

2   Ibid.

1.1

Methodology

UNFOLD began from the imperative to instigate new conversations on the possibilities of preservation to be much more than a perpetual process of changing operating systems. To do so, 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. The formulation of different questions and subquestions has been a crucial research method during the development of the project. Some questions have been answered and some others have led to the configuration of new questions that, moreover, have moved the research initiative to new and unexpected terrains. In other words, the combination of presentations by experts in different fields (dance, musicology, preservation, etc.) opened a discussion that allowed for greater flexibility in the trajectory of the project and the emergence of new questions and unforeseen issues. The second section of this report presents a genealogy of those questions, laying out the project design and how those questions were incorporated within it.

As stated above, the creation of an interdisciplinary and international research team has been crucial during the development of the project. From a conceptual point of view, we have been forced to "develop a keen understanding of the context in which non-object based information is used, in order to ensure capture of all the vital data necessary to meaningful retrieval."[3] From the very beginning we were all very much aware of how many past questions had been centred in technical responses to a rapid technological obsolescence, the deterioration of materials or the varied installation requirements. With the necessity of preserving long-term custody of all forms of recorded material, we have tried to use this project to highlight the necessity to continue researching beyond the object to the medium, and more urgently, beyond the medium towards the work's capacity to generate networks of relations that interconnect different versions of a same work.

As stated above, the will to incorporate as many research approaches as possible led us to commission Joost Rekveld to create a reinterpretation of two pioneering experimental video works by Steina and Woody Vasulka (*Reminiscence* and *Telc*, both made in 1974). Rekveld created an analog HD video work guided by the concept of 'reafference', a term that refers to the perceptual changes caused when one moves his/her sensory organs. From the perspective of UNFOLD's research imperatives, the purpose of this commission was to allow the project's participants to track the development of a reinterpretation project. To do this, Rekveld presented the progress of his research at each of the network meetings. Following these presentations participants were invited to ask questions, providing the opportunity to understand Rekveld's creative process in light of the theoretical trajectories of our discussions and the other (more theoretically-inclined) presentations. The third part of this report incorporates the description of this process in more detail.

The fourth section of this report incorporates a text written by Gabriella Giannachi, professor of performance and new media at the University of Exeter, who conceptualises the idea of conservation as an interpretative act as the possibility of "revisit[ing] the past as present and futures that may have transformatively emerged from the same past."[4] Taking as a theoretical ground the research presented in the exhibition *History Will Repeat Itself* (KW Institute for Contemporary Art Berlin 2008) curated by Inke Arns and Gabriele Horn, Giannachi's theoretical input has been crucial for us to frame reinterpretation not so much as an affirmative confirmation of the past, but rather as so many questionings of the present.

We have also incorporated the manifesto of the project, which presents the conclusions of the research and the direction that future research—which, as we argue, is urgent—will take.

---

3   Abby Smith, *Preservation in the Future Tense*, 1998: §6.
     In: http://www.clir.org/pubs/issues/issues03.html#preserve

4   Gabriella Giannachi, `At the edge of the 'living present´, 2017:4

2

**The question as a
Research Strategy**

Artists' increasing use of multimedia, digital, and internet media since the 1960s has called into question the conventional strategies by which society preserves and redisplays cultural artefacts created with media technologies. While rapid technological obsolescence is the most obvious vulnerability of new media art, the nature of multimedia artworks calls for the development of new standards and techniques within preservation strategies. The idea that certain artworks incorporating an array of media elements could be variable opens up the possibility for experimental standards of transmission and preservation. Here, we believe that the evaluation of other aspects—including hybrid, contextual, or 'live' qualities of media art— can open up, and sometimes contradict, more traditional modes of conservation.

Other disciplines such as theatre, dance, and music have integrated reinterpretation as one of their main transmission strategies. As in these art forms, our initial hypothesis was that reinterpreting new media art would imply recreating the work each time it is exhibited or displayed. In some cases, reinterpretation would mean rewriting codes for different platforms; in others, reinterpretation may be the only way to recreate performed, installed, or networked art designed to vary with context.

It was in the very first stages of our research that we realised how reinterpretation (understood as: to understand and explain or show a work in a new or different way each time it is re-created) had been rarely addressed when debating on media art transmission and preservation and thus still needed to be further tested, practised and questioned to get a sense of its potentiality. With this idea in mind, we decided to start the investigation with seven preliminary questions, which were divided into three different groups. Moreover, and in order to address the different groups of questions, we used the expert meeting and the public event as a research format in which different experts were gathered to discuss the questions directly:

Group 1 (1st Expert Meeting + 1st Public Event):

- Can reinterpretation as creative act be seen as preservation strategy?
- Can we integrate other methodologies of preservation like those of theatre, music and dance in the preservation of media art and performance?
- What are the paradigms of the preservation of an artwork of ephemeral nature?

Group 2 (2nd Network Meeting + 2nd Public Event):

- How would notions such as authenticity or authorship be affected by using reinterpretation as a transmission and mediation strategy for media art?
- Until which extend must reinterpretation be warrant by the original artist?

Group 3 (Workshop + Expert Meeting):

- Should we encourage reinterpretation to be broadly accepted in media art's mediation, transmission and preservation?

Conclusions (3rd Network Meeting)

2.1

Group 1

The first network meeting and first public event took place in June 2016 in Amsterdam, with the participation of Vera Sofia Mota (artist), Fransien van der Putt (radio artist and researcher), Suzanne Tuncha (choreographer), Britte Sloothaak (curator), Serena Cangiano (curator and 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), Kristin Scheving (visual artist, curator and project manager), Joost Rekveld (artist), Maura Favero (art historian), Vivian van Saaze (co-ordinator of the Maastricht Centre for Arts, Conservation and Heritage), Claudia Roeck (conservator), Katja Kwastek (professor of art history), and Manuel Pelmus (artist). As a starting point, and during these first encounters, we directed our attention to disciplines with a long and rich tradition in mediating work by reinterpretation as music, theatre, and dance, which have ensured their transmission and preservation through live performance. By thinking about how to integrate other methodologies of preservation in the conservation of media art and performance, a subgroup of questions was configured during the meeting:

Subquestions Group 1:

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 script, code or text would be needed to translate media or digital art? Which are the parameter for a specific piece? How to concentrate in the Abstraction of an experience?

Thanks to the configuration of this new group of questions, discourses on liveness and performativity in the field of performance, theatre and music studies were incorporated. Here, key elements such as presence, agency, embodiment, and the importance of the event and the audience in relation to media art were integrated next to the exposition of a theoretical background drawn from Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever*. That is, the group of subquestions

permitted us to address the human body itself as an archive, trying to "enunciate a past that reaches us through what has been forgotten."[5]

Relevant to this first encounter was also the incorporation of discourses coming from the field of performance studies. For example, Diana Taylor 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."[6] Here Taylor proposes that, through embodiment, and therefore through the use of the body as a form of archive, we enable performance to `remain´. Thanks to the active participation in the meetings of artist Manuel Pelmus and his idea of `embodied history´, choreographer Suzan Tuncha and her presentation around the 'intuitive body', or the research around Nan Hoover's archive by Vera Sofia Mota and Fransien van der Putt among other members in the network meetings, we were able to question the possibility of reinterpretation of artworks through the use of the body. An `embodied history´ that produces different readings of the past, present and future with and through the audience. Specially inspiring here was also the two-year research project *Inside Movement Knowledge* (IMK), an interdisciplinary research project into new methods for the documentation, transmission and preservation of contemporary choreographic and dance knowledge. The overall aim of the IMK was to contribute to dance's artistic and professional development and enhance the potential of its social benefits by making it more accessible for specialist and general audiences.

All the arguments exposed were brought into dialogue with another key figure in performance studies, Peggy Phelan. Phelan argues that "the process of selection, memorization or internalization, and transmission takes place within (and in turn helps

5   *Archive Fever*: A Freudian Impression is a translation of a published lecture that Derrida delivered in 1994. Derrida discusses the role of inscription technology in the psyche and in the archives as part of a larger examination of the notion of archive in Sigmund Freud's works. To think about archives, what they mean, what they contain, and how they are constructed, led the research to the idea of repetition, a repetitive force, the retention of a specific origin through repetition. As Derrida states, the One (in this case the archive) cannot distinguish itself from the Other without a constant reiteration of itself. In the ceaseless work to maintain one memory at the expense of another the archive not only maintains and curates memory, but buries it as well.

6   Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, Durham: Duke UP, 2003:23

Fig. 1.
UNFOLD, 1st Network Meeting, from left to right choreographer Suzanne Tuncha radio artist and researcher Fransien van der Putt, artist Vera Sofia Mota and curator Britte Sloothaak, June 2016 (Amsterdam)

constitute) specific systems of representation.''[7] In other words, 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. We could argue that what Phelan is proposing is that every act of reproduction would directly be an act of reinterpretation, as it is impossible to repeat exactly what has already happened. In contrast to Phelan we explore reinterpretation through re-enactment or re performance as preservation strategy.

It is important to highlight how this first group of questions expanded the terrain in which we were framing reinterpretation in the first place. That is, the attention was now directed to question the existence of an original and individual piece living in isolation, and the impossibility of its exact repeatability.

Moreover, and 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.

Overall, and always revolving around the very first concern of this first group of questions -can reinterpretation as creative act be seen as preservation strategy?- the network concluded this first block by arguing that, although the answer will differ from case to case, it is difficult not to identify reinterpretation as a creative act without considering it in relation to another work. That is, although a reinterpretation can constitute a new act, reinterpretation will always exist in a network that connects it with another work. Interestingly, reinterpretation has as its base the word interpret, which is from the Latin word interpretari, which means `explain or understand.´ We hence allow ourselves to understand reinterpretation as the process from which one tries to understand another creative process and how this process emerged in the first place. Having arrived at this point, we agreed that reinterpretation doesn't aim at reproducing a work from the past in the present but rather works towards the creation of a new work that will coexist in relation to other works.

7   Peggy Phelan cited in Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, Durham: Duke UP, 2003:20

2.2

Group 2

The second network meeting and public event took place on 14th September 2016 and gathered experts from different disciplines such as Adad Hannah (artist, who joined via Skype), Fransien van der Putt (radio artist and researcher), Suzanne Tuncha (choreographer), Claudia Roeck (conservator), 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), Kristin Scheving (curator and project manager), Joost Rekveld (artist), Emma Panza (curator), Karin de Wild (art historian and researcher), Adam Lockhart (art historian and conservator), Martine Neddam (artist), Sarah Cook (art historian, curator and researcher), Hilde van den Dobbelsteen (LIMA) Katja Kwastek (professor of art history) Annet Dekker (Theorist, curator). Our research was now directed towards the notions of variability and repetition in digital and media art works.

As a result of the first encounters, we argue how reinterpretation refers for UNFOLD to artistic creation rather than a recreation or imitation of a historical artefact or event. An artistic creation is ´a process – an activity - a thought.´ Thus, reinterpretation becomes an act of reflection that doesn't aim at reproducing a work from the past in the present but rather activates a process, an activity and a thought towards the creation of a new work, which, as well, will coexist with other works. Adapting what choreographer Nicole Beutler suggests, we would argue that Reinterpretation proposes a rearticulation of artistic thought as it unfolds in the original work.

Sub-questions Group 2:

The origin is confronted with the idea of rhizome: What happens if we open the constellation thinking more about circular history than linearity? Can we still think from a beginning to an end? Or should we talk about different faces in the actualization of the art works? Preservation is always changing. It can reconcile opposites. But how much change 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?

As Lev Manovich writes in *The Language of New Media* (2002), "a new media object is not fixed, but can exist in potential infinite versions."[8] If the first group of questions was dedicated to the live qualities of media and digital art, its conclusion and awareness of the potentiality for considering reinterpretation, not as a separate act or result, but rather as an element of an infinite network in which the artwork has no origin or end opened up a new terrain that radically changed the second group of questions proposed in the first place.

During the second round of encounters with the members of the network, artist Martine Neddam described how, "concerning net art, reinterpretation is present in every act of transmission. [...] Re-interpretation is at work everywhere, from the net page being reinterpreted by the local browser, to the pervasive circulation of memes online."[9] Neddam used her participation in the meeting to expose her doubts about the prefix 're-' of reinterpretation: for her, it presupposes that there is one identifiable beginning or unity in the artwork. Neddam proposes to think on the 'generative' capacity of media art in an ecology that she presents as ´generative transmission´: "with internet you can't really separate the art from the circulation of the art, the piece from the museum."[10] As Neddam also notes in her interaction, "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?"[11]

Positioning the discourse within this framework, we decided to frame reinterpretation within another vocabulary that seemed to be permanently present in each of our discussions. The term reinterpretation is examined *vis-à-vis* others, like reimagining, regenerative, reenacting, remediation, retransmission, recreation, remake, remix, reactionisation, reactualisation, resonance, recycle, retrace, restaging or reperformed. It is noticeable how the prefix 're-'

8   Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 2002:56 in: http://pages.uoregon.edu/farhad/Mat/Lev_Manovich-The_Language_of_New_Media.pdf

9   Martine Neddam, transcription of a quote extracted from the discussion during the 2nd network meeting of UNFOLD, 2016

10   ibid

11   ibid

creates a conjunction within the different terms, and how it is precisely the prefix 're-' what invokes memory practices yet produced from the here and now. One main concern during this second phase of the project is precisely how to integrate all the knowledge from other disciplines within media art. It is agreed how difficult, and perhaps unproductive, has been to try to come up with a concrete definition of reinterpretation to be further applied to all the disciplines. Rather than redirect all our attention into such a task, we proposed to examine what we address as the `dimensions´ of a work. Here, reinterpretation would be one action (or dimension) between others. By doing so, we propose mapping reinterpretation within different dimensions and try to collect the touching points. Coming from a musicological perspective, Sander van Maas suggested to take in consideration the notion of time: how time changes and transforms; how time can also talk about process rather than a final object that seems finite. The discussion acquires the potentiality of talking about the `live circle of a work´ rather than the `original´ or the beginning: a rhizomatic or multidimensional space in which many subjects, temporalities and spaces coexist.

Crucial at this stage of the research was the incorporation of the theories by art historian Georges Didi-Huberman in which he states that "works of art do not have just one life. They have the life of their own making, but also many (after) lives after that."[12] As he continues, "they live like ghosts in history. In order to understand artworks we should not only think of them in the context of artistic mastery, but also include their contemporary meanings."[13] During her intervention, Karin de Wild similarly suggested that the "crucial question is (especially for interactive artworks) how do we recreate the past and how can we stimulate re-engagement with it? In other words, how do we remember the past? The cultural clock always ticks on and we all know that only fragments of history will survive. Some elements will stay the same, others will become obsolete or mutate. In 2017 the social, cultural and technological context is fundamentally different from 20 years ago."[14]

12   Georges Didi-Huberman, *The Surviving Image. Phantoms of Time and Time Phantoms: Aby Warburg's Histpry of Art*, Penn State University Press, 2016:120

13   ibid

14   Karin de Wild, transcription of a quote extracted from the discussion during the 2nd network meeting of UNFOLD, 2016

Fig. 2.
UNFOLD, 2nd
Network Meeting,
September 2016
(Amsterdam)

Curator Emma Panza revisited during her participation in the meeting her investigation on the relations and overlappings between performative practice and curatorial practice; working with the archive of De Appel (Amsterdam) allows her to search for inspiration, and to develop strategies. In that sense, approaching the archive presented an opportunity for Emma to investigate the ways in which she could "perform" the role of curator. Moreover, curator Sarah Cook proposed during this second meeting a theoretical framework around the notion (borrowed from Hanna Hölling) that all artworks could be conceived of as temporal objects, inhabiting specific `relative durations´. As Hanna Hölling questions herself: "Can we conceive of artworks in terms of their temporal duration – as events, performances and processes? Can artworks, including the recent portion of artistic production as well as traditional artworks, be rethought in terms of time and their intrinsic temporalities? Why and how would it matter for their conservation?"[15] This idea, next to keywords presented by Cook borrowed this time by Domenico Quaranta's in his article `Lost in Translation´ such as 'fidelity' and 'transparency', offered a new research terrain for the Project; the opportunity to rethink traditional paradigms of conservation that regard objects as fixed and static entities. Indeed, changeability and impermanence, characteristics that were posed as problematic at the beginning of this project, were transformed now as conditions of possibility for media and digital art's survival.

The incorporation of Annet Dekker's investigation of storytelling as a means of navigating archived material was crucial at this point. 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. Second, by selecting works by artist Erica Scourti ("The Outage" (2014) and "The Dark Archive" (2016), she 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 reinterpretation of everyday life through the production of new narratives. For Dekker, 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 archaeology, oral history, and ethnography, in which the analysis of storytelling has a more firmly established status as a research method.

15   Hanna Hölling, `An Aesthetics of Change: on the relative durations of the impermanent and critical thinking in conservation´, paper presented during the symposium Authenticity in Transition at the Glasgow School of Art/ University of Glasgow (1–2 December 2014), found in: https://seminesaa.hypotheses.org/7948

2.3

Group 3

Fig. 3.
UNFOLD. Expert
Meeting, December
2016 (Amsterdam)

An expert meeting was celebrated on 1st December 2016, concentrating on the consequences of using, as a mode of mediation, the act of reinterpretation. The key lecturers, theatre studies professor Maaike Bleeker, artist Jan Robert Leegte, and conservator Sanneke Stigter, with a skype intervention by curator Serena Cangiano, were invited to have a closer look into the politics of preservation when talking about reinterpretation. By doing so, we were able to discuss 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. Furthermore, as indicated before, one main question guided this third phase of the project: should we encourage reinterpretation to be broadly accepted in media art's mediation, transmission and preservation?

As briefly indicated in section 2.1 of this text when referring to the incorporation of discourses coming from performance studies, and especially that of Diana Taylor, Bleeker also incorporated during her intervention Taylor's distinction between *archive* and *repertoire*. The *repertoire of embodied memory*— conveyed in gestures, the spoken word, movement, dance, song, and other performances— is discussed by Taylor as a proposition for alternative perspectives to those derived from the written archive and particularly useful for a reconsideration of historical processes of transnational contact. The archive is thus understood as a tool to investigate the past, to go backwards, while repertoire brings the past into a live present; that is, repertoire has a "future-orientedness." Bleeker proposes thinking about the choreographic object as an abstraction that is not limited to a particular 'materialisation', but open to infinite potential materialisations.

Artist Jan Robert Leegte, in that sense, suggested during his intervention to approach reinterpretation as a tool for 'rooting' a way of thinking in relation to the digital; a possible way to emancipate the platform of the digital. Reinterpretation as an artistic method is able to zoom in on specific aspects of a piece and how those could be contextualised in a new digital context. In a sense, Leegte proposes the idea of reinterpretation as a `revision´, which highlights the importance to understand the ambivalence of materiality within digital media platforms.

Curator Serena Cangiano proposes us to differentiate between the strategy of open reprogramming and the re-making. In her own words "every remake based on new technologies and new materials entails a radical process of re-design. While on one hand this strategy betrays the uniqueness and originality of the artwork, on the other it answers new questions concerning the conservation of kinetic end interactive artworks that cannot be simply contemplated, but call for active audience participation." Cangiano shares with us how, after a week-long workshop in which they spent translating and subverting the artistic concepts of Gruppo T's work, they "realized that applying the new paradigms of collaborative development, augmented by the Internet, helped [them] to understand how to achieve the distributed, everyday aesthetic action that was part of the Gruppo T's utopia (so the artists' intentions)." Through the open making of derivative works they "learned how to liberate the artwork and to ensure that it lives on: once it is part of the commons, it is not a case of granting everyone the right to reproduce it, but rather conferring the responsibility to preserve its essence. That is the main benefit of open sourcing projects, processes and artworks."

While Cangiano proposed open sourcing as preservation strategy, and how the method of re-enacting practices rather than the remaking of artworks activates an exchange of knowledge, conservator Sanneke Stigter made us reflect about the act of conservation per se, its ethics, its constraints and politics. To do so, Stigter discussed ethnography as a research method in museums. She compared her method of autoethnography to Vivian van Saaze's "participatory observation" (in *Installation Art and the Museum* (2013)) and Glenn Wharton's "participatory action research" (in *The Painted King* (2012)). From a conservator perspective, Stigter observed, the act of reinstallation could be understood as a possible act of reinterpretation. Interestingly, Stigter suggests how reinterpretation allows preservation to happen within the creative process.

2.4

Conclusions

The last network meeting of the first year of UNFOLD took place on 7th February 2017 in Amsterdam. Starting in March 2016, UNFOLD has shown at this stage some results or processes publically and in different venues and formats. For example, Joost Rekveld premiered his work #67 in the International Rotterdam Film Festival 2017, theorist and researcher Gabriella Giannachi wrote a text reflecting about the project that will be published in an upcoming Reader, and researcher Lara Garcia Diaz was invited to the symposium *Future Proof?!* to talk about UNFOLD's results. Receiving attention from different peers and institutions, the last network meeting represented the last opportunity to come up together and be able to draw the conclusions of this very productive first year. The meeting counted with the participation of Vera Sofia Mota (Artist), Fransien Van Der Putt (Dramaturg, Radio Artist and Researcher), Claudia Roeck (conservator), Josef Gründler (artist), Christian Sancto (researcher), Gabriella Giannachi (professor of performance and new media), Elisabeth Schimana, (composer, performer and radio artist), Gaby Wijers (director of LIMA), Lara Garcia Diaz (art theorist and researcher), Joost Rekveld (artist), Hilde van den Dobbelsteen, Sanneke Stigter (conservator), Jon Ippolito (artist and theorist), Annet Dekker (researcher and curator), Josef Gründler (artist).

More than attempting to forge solid conclusions, the intention during this meeting was to highlight how throughout the project we have been constantly highlighting the tensions and resistances that have resulted from proposing reinterpretation as a preservation strategy. As exposed before, we have used the question rather than the response as a research method, allowing us to stretch theoretical horizons that have permitted other disciplines to coexist. Indeed, from the initial question (Can reinterpretation as a creative act be seen as preservation strategy?) we have perhaps arrived to its inversion, can preservation be understood as a creative act and therefore include reinterpretation as one of its strategies? The duality between, on the one hand, the idea of conservation as a creative act and, on the other, artists reinterpreting and contributing to conservation processes have pivoted our thoughts. With no clear ground yet, we have nonetheless used such a position to frame Reinterpretation within a temporality that does not obey to linearity but rather to the network form. That is, we have been able to confront the idea of the origin suggested by classic art historian discourses and we have used the rhizome as a research plane to investigate preservation not just as a practical necessity, but as a creative space.

Thereafter, we have framed reinterpretation as a tool that rethinks, rearticulates, or, as Giannachi suggests by the use of Giorgio Agamben's idea of repetition, allows us to live what has perhaps been unlived. That is, reinterpretation as the exploration of the past from the present that equally permits the questioning of our contemporaneity and the devising other futures. Nonetheless, in order to do so, many discourses on authorship and conservation ethics need to be challenged and opened. In his presentation Jon Ippolito highlighted the importance of the social impact in what the object is. Here, Ippolito briefly presented his research into indigenous media and their mode of preserving culture. He discussed the case of a Malangaan 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 Malangaan 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 Malangaan 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 Ippolito 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.

In conclusion, the complexities of integrating reinterpretation within debates of cultural heritage preservation necessitates to go beyond the art piece or its author and incorporate gallerists, private collectors, conservator, archivists, historians, lawyers, or even economists, to name just a few. By doing so, we could, for example, really question how institutional policies would need to change if reinterpre-

tation is practised as a preservation strategy. Here, we believe that further research will need to unfold the layers of institutional practices while re-evaluating current attitudes and methodologies of practical conservation. Moreover, such attitudes should also be confronted with the idea that some artworks are not built to last and that it is precisely its ephemeral status what frames its conceptual meaning.

2.5

Future Research Projections

The participants 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 re-interpretation? 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.

This project would not have been possible without the participation of Vera Sofia Mota, Fransien van der Putt, Suzanne Tuncha, Serena Cangiano, Gabriella Giannachi, Elisabeth Schimana, Sander van Maas, Gaby Wijers, Kristin Scheving, Joost Rekveld, The Vasulkas, Vivian van Saaze, Claudia Roeck, Katja Kwastek, Karin de Wild, Martine Neddam, Sarah Cook, Annet Dekker, Maaike Bleeker, Jan Robert Leegte, Sanneke Stigter, Jon Ippolito, and Josef Gründler.

It is in the vein of the overwhelmingly positive answer to the question 'Can reinterpretation as a creative act be seen as preservation strategy for media artworks?' that this multidisciplinary network of experts and institutions comprising UNFOLD now ventures to launch a number of experiments in reinterpretation. The intention is to further explore strategic dimensions of reinterpretations in terms of artistic yield, degrees of necessity in relation to certain types of works, the required new ways of documenting and redeploying various contexts—and as an important objective: further unfolding the relations between the conservation community, artists, and audiences.

3

Joost Rekveld

Broadly speaking, Joost Rekveld's work is concerned with the ways in which technological processes (in both analogue and digital media) can mediate modes of perceiving one's surroundings. Rekveld's primary theoretical point of reference is the German biologist Jakob Von Uexkull (whose writing has been very influential for more well-known philosophers such as Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Gilles Deleuze), in particular his notion that perception is developed through the innumerable encounters that an individual (human or animal) has with its surroundings; each sensory system is thus seen as singular, relative, and plastic.

For his UNFOLD commission, Rekveld was asked to select two works by experimental video artist duo Woody & Steina Vasulka to reinterpret: he chose *Telc* (1974) and *Reminiscence* (1974). Both of these works belong to the Vasulkas' series of experiments with Rutt/Etra Scan Processor (alongside other works such as *C-Trend*). The Scan Processor is a scan deflection tool designed by Steve Rutt and Bill Etra in 1973. In *Telc*, this device is used to transform Portapak images from a trip to a town in Southern Bohemia; similarly, *Reminiscence* (1974) is based on footage that Woody recorded during his visit to a farmhouse in Moravia (where he spent some time in childhood). The resulting works have a strong first-person perspective that seems to navigate an almost abstract, but haptic, image space. In both works, the recorded sound remains unaltered, anchoring these abstract images firmly in an everyday world.

This approach demonstrates an overriding concept in the work of the Vasulkas, where the focus is not so much on the linear passage of time but on interference and transformation. In *Telc* and *Reminiscence*, the deflection process to which the footage was subjected most readily suggests that this artistic intervention defamiliarises the encounters with Woody's past. Rekveld, however, approached his reinterpretation of *Telc* and *Reminiscence* with a different set of concerns: his focus was on the works as experiments with modes of perceiving. The aim of Rekveld's reinterpretive project is to investigate the possibilities of wearable devices that give a different kind of sensory access to the environment.

Researching other sensors than the visual and the audible, like electrostatic sensors in combination with sensors for electromagnetic fields, temperature gradients or the direction of polarisation of light come to mind. The aim would be to make work that also strongly conveys the impression of navigating through a space, but to visualize a space that is not derived from visual information.

In his presentations in UNFOLD's three network meetings, Rekveld gave the other participants the opportunity to follow the progress of his research. This included, on a practical level, the various preparatory works and experiments that led to the development of the equipment used to make *#67*; and on a theoretical level, the dialogue that Rekveld established between his own artistic preoccupations and the aesthetic and theoretical concerns elaborated in the Vasulkas' works. The insights into reinterpretive artistic practices yielded by following this process step-by-step will be discussed below.

3.1

Workshop

From 29 November to 1 December 2016, LIMA facilitated a practice-based public workshop, led by Rekveld, during which eight participants—most of whom were artists working with electronic or mobile devices—were introduced to different schools of thought dealing with human perception, from ancient concepts of perception as a meeting of influences, to cognitive psychology. Inspiration was taken from animal senses that, compared to human senses, have a range that is sometimes refined to the most basic imaginable. The workshop provided examples of attempts to understand non-human perspectives, such as the sensory worlds of most animals, which remain almost completely inaccessible to us. It also considered research into the development of artificial eyes for blind people and think

about cyborgs and the intimate relations between humans and technological devices. The workshop aimed to explore questions like: How does modifying one's sensory system affect interaction with one's environment? Do we discover things we did not know before?

Through developing and using wearable devices, the participants experimented with the perception of their surroundings. Taking inspiration from the two aforementioned video works by the Vasulkas, the participants aimed to translate the output of various types of sensors into real-time visuals. Android phones installed in DIY cardboard 'virtual reality' viewers were used, and the participants' own self-built devices were tested during short field trips around the city. Rekveld and the workshop's participants gave an informal interactive demonstration of their work on the final day of the workshop.

Fig. 4.
UNFOLD. Workshop,
December 2016
(Amsterdam)

3.2

Premiere of #67 at IFFR

#67, the video that resulted from Rekveld's research into reinterpretation as part of UNFOLD, premiered at the International Film Festival Rotterdam on 29 January 2017. It was the fourth film shown as part of a screening dedicated to the artist's work, (Rekveld was one of the artists in focus at IFFR in 2017) entitled Light Matters; the other three—*#23.2*, *#37*, and *#43.6*—similarly deal with the correlative phenomena of light, pattern, and movement, although the visual manifestations differ quite dramatically in each case. The setting—a well-attended large screen in a commercial cinema—conferred a monumentality onto the works that other exhibition settings could not. Between the films Rekveld presented a selective chronology of some of his projects over the decade-and-a-half separating #23.2 from the premiered work, alongside his interests in material and structural processes—from crystallography to systems theory—to which many of them respond.

#67 stood out from the other three works screened in that, while its structure of acrobatic white lines on a black background gives the impression of abstraction, it is the most porous to figurative elements: in the soundtrack, apparently synchronous with the images and largely unmanipulated, one recognises a car driving past, and the distinctive tonal interruptions of a tram setting itself into motion. The viewer's attempt to associate these sounds with elements of the visual image interpellates her into a game in which the image is to be read rather than seen: but unlike the pastoral setting of Woody Vasulka's footage, and the bucolic nostalgia to which it gestures (if only to subject it to electronic distortion), Rekveld's work takes place resolutely in the present, and gives the uncanny impression of being transported through a half-recognisable hyperstimulating cityscape with the visual apparatus of a strange electrosensitive animal.

3.3

#67 as a reinterpretation

The third network meeting provided an opportunity for Rekveld to discuss *#67* with the rest of UNFOLD's participants, and to discuss the ways in which his aesthetic, technical, and theoretical concerns crystallised in the work. Reflections on the relation of this work to the issues that had animated the trajectory of the project might best be oriented around two questions:

• How has the term 'reinterpretation' functioned in the production of the work?
• What conclusions about reinterpretation can we draw from Rekveld's project in relation to the question: How might reinterpretation work as a preservation strategy?

In using these questions to orient the discussion, it was argued that the point should not be to determine whether Rekveld's work conforms to a particular definition of 'reinterpretation', but to note the diverse kinds of artistic strategies that the term can designate. When commissioned to make a 'reinterpretive' work, what strategies or approaches does an artist—in this case Rekveld—deploy? Moreover, Rekveld's work was unique amongst the other case studies used in the project in that the commission functioned to give UNFOLD's participants the opportunity to follow the creative process of producing a reinterpretation; as such, drawing attention to the process of production as a whole rather than just the 'final product' seemed to be the most fruitful way of directing our reflections.

Considerations of the operativity of the term 'reinterpretation' revolved around three moments of the process. The first of these was what we might call 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 so on. 'Reinterpretation' functioned here as a stimulus to research. Secondly, the workshop, in which the focus was mostly on the technical production of wearable devices for modulating perception of the environment; the exploration of these possibilities, rather than navigating the aesthetic and methodological issues of reinterpreting

artworks, was the primary purpose. The final film's crystallisation of these efforts—the third 'moment'—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; the "strong first-person perspective that seems to navigate an almost abstract, but haptic, image space" and the still-recognisable sonic elements (cars, trains, etc.). In this work, presented as the final effort of a reinterpretive project, formal parallels with the reinterpreted works seem to index reinterpretation 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.

Taking into account reinterpretation as a process in this way lent another dimension to one of the questions that has directed UNFOLD: that of reinterpretation functioning as a preservation strategy. This, namely, is that preservation may have as its object not of discrete works themselves, but an artistic method, approach, or 'way of working'. Perhaps it was through his research into the Vasulkas' aesthetic and theoretical concerns and the technical means by which their works were realised, and by attempting to synthesise these findings with his own artistic interests, that Rekveld's work could be said to 'preserve' an approach to art-making from an earlier era. To take a concrete example: Rekveld stated that this project led to him developing an interest in the Rutt/Etra Scan Processor—hardly used today—and eventually to building one himself. As such, if there is an emergent 'preservationist' ethic in Rekveld's work, we might conclude that it consists in reworking the concerns of earlier works and technologies through contemporary artistic preoccupations.

4

At the edge of the 'living present´
by Gabriella Giannachi

During UNFOLD, Gabriella Giannachi (Professor in Performance and New Media, university of Exeter), researched re-enactments and re-interpretations as strategies for the preservation of performance and new media arts. Various drafts of her paper were discussed.

Her work ''At the edge of the 'living present': re-enactments and re-interpretations as strategies for the preservation of performance and new media arts'' will be published as part of the book *Histories of Performance Documentation: Museum, Artistic and Scholarly Practices* by G. Giannachi and J. Westerman (eds), Routledge, London and New York, 2017.

5

Conclusions

UNFOLD: Mediation by Reinterpretation is a research project organized by LIMA (www.li-ma.nl), the aim of which is to examine reinterpretation as a strategy for the preservation and documentation of media art. The project has initiated a line of research in which the potential and consequences of reinterpretation have been addressed when debating media art mediation, transmission and preservation. The project has comprised three network meetings, one expert meeting, three public events and one practical workshop in collaboration with Sonic Acts. Additionally, the project commissioned a work by Dutch artist Joost Rekveld: the resulting video, *#67*, a reinterpretation of two works by experimental artist duo Woody & Steina Vasulka, was premiered at the International Film Festival Rotterdam in January 2017.

UNFOLD has brought together participants from diverse professional backgrounds: artists, art curators, archivists, conservators, choreographers, musicologists, media, theatre and performance scholars, as well as those whose practices traverse several of these occupations. Conducting discussions with practitioners from a variety of disciplines has been essential to working through the notion of reinterpretation: not only does the concept have different theoretical and practical significance for different art forms and professional roles; these differences are also constitutive of the day-to-day practice of art creation and conservation, since what the artwork is - where the boundaries of its mutability lie - inevitably depends on the conflicts and compromises of different professional interests under the practical exigencies of exhibiting, performing, and archiving artworks.

How to revisit media and digital artworks over time? Several attempts are aimed at ensuring that media and digital art, its ephemeral material and the audience experience, remains through its preservation. Preserving media art works is related to issues of technological obsolescence, networked connectivity and interactive nature of digital art. A range of elements pushes the boundaries of traditional preservation methods and requires insights from both the artist and the curator to determine the future viability of restaging the piece. Conservation is concentrating primarily on authenticity and functionality in relation to the rapid development of browsers, screens and changing operating systems. How do we deal with the changes of digital or media artworks over time and how can that performativity be preserved?

UNFOLD began by posing a main question: Can reinterpretation as a creative act be seen as preservation strategy for media artworks? The final answer: yes! The discussions the project has produced have left the participants and organisers convinced that reinterpretation is one of the most important new developments in theories and practices of preservation. Indeed, it not only raises questions about the complex debates of cultural heritage preservation but also triggers institutional practices while re-evaluates current attitudes and methodologies of practical conservation, documentation or exhibition.

Henceforth, this initial foray has only been able to scratch the surface of this potentially deep pool of strategies for both art practice and preservation. At this stage, and after having developed the grounds for a conceptual framework, reinterpretation now needs to be further tested in art institutions and museums. Reinterpretation has a great potential not only to activate collections and archives but also to unfold creative and curatorial processes. Moreover, through the act of reinterpreting, new publics could use the art institutions and the museum as a platform of debate and discussion. Here, the capacity of reinterpretation to rethink, rearticulate and recontextualize artistic thought would allow for the exploration of the past from the present that equally questions our contemporaneity and devises other possible futures.