

THE (RE)MEDIATION OF EXPERIENCE. A CASE STUDY

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In this paper we introduce our approach in (re)mediating the aesthetic experience of a video installation into a digital dispositif by developing a simulative and a transformative display model, which should highlight the experiential possibilities of the installation. Thereby our research focuses on the theoretical implications and limitations of a translation of experience and strengthens the interpretative component of these transformations.

Experience plays a crucial role in understanding video installations. Each video installation evolves a genuine relation between moving images, display and visitors. By dealing with video installations in the fields of art history and preservation, experience has to be taken into account as a result of this relation. Therefore, the approach of our case study is to introduce a dynamic notion of experience, taking into account the multimodal nature of experience in video installations. A second argument is given by the fact that aesthetic experience is subjective. Meanwhile, these fields also emphasise the necessity to register visitor-experience, although no standardised methods have been proposed so far. In the last decade, several art preservation studies have taken into account the experience of video installations (inter alia *Inside Installations* (2004–2007), *PRACTICs* (2008–2011), Mörth/Hochmayr 2008, Wolfensberger 2009, Jones/Muller 2009). These case studies reveal empirical data on visitor experience and discuss the outcome in relation to the artists' intended ideal experience. Additionally, a number of documentation models on interactive video installations have been developed, some of them also involving experience (Docam Documentation Model, Capturing unstable media conceptual model and Giebeler 2009). The applied methods, such as video documentation, qualitative as well as quantitative interviews and video-cued recalls, were used from the fields of ethnology, history and social sciences. No doubt, experience is an issue both in art history and art preservation. Problems occur, when for documentation purposes access to the installation in presence is not provided anymore.

Challenges in Viewing and Translating Video Installations

Howard Besser defined in 2001 two challenges regarding electronic art, namely "the viewing problem" and "the translation problem". [1] There he addressed the fact, that devices which deliver information for different senses all become obsolete at some point and the information has to be translated into new generations of delivery devices (viewing problem), which possibly affects the meaning of the art project (translation problem). When it comes to documenting video installations, which is foremost done by photography, video or text-based descriptions, a double bind occurs: Although experience is necessary for understanding video installations, the experience itself, whether aimed by the artist or performed by the visitor, is lost in the documentation, as the experience is bound to the presence of the video installation in exhibition. Moreover, with the documentation or translation of the artwork into a digital archiveable format the information on space, the temporal components, interactivity and experiential possibilities of the installation are obscured. At the same time "[t]he relationship between the work of art, the space and the viewer's own body strongly determines the perception of the work. The

internal spatial relations and the position of an installation in space are difficult to represent two-dimensionally but are at the same time of essential importance when it comes to description and re-installation.” [2] But nevertheless these archived versions of the artworks have to serve as the basis for research and education in many cases and oftentimes become a surrogate of the art project. Therefore we propose an expanded notion of art documentation by highlighting the experiential possibilities of a work and maybe allow a pseudo-experience of the work, which should come near to the real-life experience or at least create a mental representation of it.

In terms of experiencing video installations beyond their exhibition, we acknowledge case studies and generated material on the experience of video installations. However, within our case study, we want to experiment with transforming the video installation into a different media dispositif and therewith mediating the experience by the means of digital media in terms of dissemination and communication and in the same time remediating it in the sense of Bolter and Grusin. [3] The aim is to create an understanding of the possible experiences in a specific installation and to find a workable solution which can be used in everyday documentation work. Moreover, the translation should be usable in online-archives, especially enabling to re-present projects which would be difficult to access or reinstall otherwise and therewith make them better accessible for research and education.

Simulating and Transforming Visitor-Experience

Our case study consists of two phases. Phase one is an evaluation of the conceptual implications and limitations for (re)mediating the experience of video installations by the means of digital media. What are the challenges of (re)mediating experience and in which respect digital media can overcome these challenges? We aim to answer these questions by developing two display models, a simulative and a transformative display model. Hereby, we work with selected video installations, taking into account their various concepts of experience.

DISPLAY 1 – SIMULATION:

For this simulative approach, close to the outer appearance of the installation in presence, we want to evaluate amongst others virtual reality applications such as virtual worlds or metaverses as one target dispositif. Following a paper from Narcis and Roc Parés (2006) virtual reality can be seen as a rule-based system. There exists a striking similarity to installations involving interactive elements and therefore it qualifies for this approach. [4] Moreover, metaverses enable the co-presence of visitors and therefore expand the virtual experience. We see these translated versions literally as digital re-presentations or re-installations and the presentation environment as digital display in its own right. The research project ‘Inside Installations’ already evaluated the use of 3D modelling for documentation purposes as “3D-techniques enable installations to be reconstructed and made accessible on the screen in such a way that researchers can obtain a much more intense experience than by studying the two-dimensional sources.” [2] Following up on previous experience of the Netherlands Media Art Institute with the use of 3D models in documenting spatial artworks our research focuses more on the theoretical implications and limitations of a translation of experience and strengthens the interpretative component of these transformations in a second display approach.

DISPLAY 2 – TRANSFORMATION:

This display model uses a more transformative approach by referring to Alain Depocas' theoretical consideration "[d]ocumentation on new media art must not be a mere illustration, but rather an interpretation, an attitude. To reflect this attitude, the documentation must adopt a structure similar to its subject's." [2] First, this approach critically engages to take the real and ideal visitor-experience into account. Secondly, the notion of "adopt[ing] a structure similar to its subject's" [5] can be referred to what Rudolf Frieling in his book 'When Formats Become Form' (2005) once called 're-formatting'. The concept of re-formatting is used by Frieling to follow the specific affordances of exhibiting cinematographic or online displays, in producing for them a second or third version of the art project. Adopting this concept of re-formatting to enable visitor-experience of a video installation beyond its exhibition display provides a more flexible basis: visitor-experience is no longer reproduced or simulated within the display model, but its structure is transformed and actualised by following the specific affordances of the display-related dispositif, ideally revealing both, real and ideal visitor-experience.

These two types of display will be realised to simulate and transform a selected video installation in dispositifs different from exhibition. Following up on this test phase we will conduct an empirical study in phase two, in which we will analyse the possibilities and limitations of the displays developed. With the use of empirical methods we will evaluate, in which way the experience of the displays resembles or respectively differs from experiencing the installation in presence, and thereby overcome challenges in documentation, which we described at the beginning.

References and Notes:

1. Howard Besser, "Longevity of Electronic Art," *GSE&IS Official Web Site*, 2001, <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/~howard/Papers/elect-art-longevity.html> (accessed November 27, 2005).
2. Gaby Wijers, "3D Documentation of Installations," *Inside Installations: Preservation and Presentation of Installation Art Web Site*, 2007, [http://www.inside-installations.org/OCMT/mydocs/3D Documentation of Installations.pdf](http://www.inside-installations.org/OCMT/mydocs/3D%20Documentation%20of%20Installations.pdf) (accessed January 12, 2011).
3. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation – Understanding New Media* (Cambridge Mass., London: MIT Press, 1999).
4. Narcis Parés and Roc Parés, "Towards a Model for a Virtual Reality Experience: The Virtual Subjectiveness," in *Presence: Teleoperators & Virtual Environments* 15, no. 5 (2006): 524–538.
5. Alain Depocas, "Digital Preservation: Recording the Recoding – the Documentary Strategy," *The Daniel Langlois Foundation Official Web Site*, 2002, <http://www.fondation-langlois.org/html/e/page.php?NumPage=152> (accessed November 1, 2010).