Activating Archival Research at V2_

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Abstract

V2_, Lab for the Unstable Media is an interdisciplinary center for art and media technology in Rotterdam that strives to build a 'living archive' of electronic art, based on documentation of more than 40 years of activities by V2_. This short presentation reflects on the work of three researchers who were commissioned to do archival research connected to the V2_archive in 2022. They presented their findings both in the form of a text and as part of a monthly radio programme by V2_. These commissions were part of V2_'s effort to show that it possible to tell *different and diverse* histories of electronic art.

Keywords

Living Archive; Electronic Art; Art History; Dissemination; Radio; Essay; Archival research

Presentation

V2_, Lab for the Unstable Media is an interdisciplinary center for art and media technology in Rotterdam (the Netherlands). Founded in 1981, V2_ creates a context in which issues regarding the social impact of technology are explored through critical dialogue, artistic reflection and practice-oriented research. V2_ organizes events, artist residenies, curates exhibitions, publishes books and commissions new work and research, Since the start, V2_ has archived documentation of its activities, which has resulted in an online archive that is freely accessible on its website. It contains descriptions of more than 1,300 events organized by V2_, along with about 600 accompanying texts, such as essays and lectures, as well as descriptions of about 1,000 works of art and other projects presented, produced and/or published by V2_. Linked to these items are videos, ranging from full recordings of events to brief interviews with artists; scanned program booklets and PDFs; and thousands of photographs. V2_ strives to activate its archive in order to give insight in the evolution of the field of art and technology. Given the important role of technology in the formation of our society, such insights are of great-value for the field of contemporary culture, for current art production, as well as for the general public.

The V2_Archive is guided by the idea that we need archives in order to be able to tell (or construct) histories of art and technology, but that archives have no use if no art histories are written. In the case of V2_ this means that its archival efforts are as much focused on issues of preservation ('keeping stuff') as on ways to produce new perspectives on the histories of the electronic and digital arts. V2_ works from the assumption that its archive does not represent a universally valid history of V2_ or of the domain in which it operates: it contains a potential for such histories to be written.

The documentation that the V2_archive offers is used to create different stories about the past, that might give insight into the now and the future – especially with regard to the effects that technology has on the arts and on society. These *different* stories, challenge the singular innovation-oriented narrative that sometimes still dominates the historical analysis of the field of art and technology.

Enabled by a small grant from the Dutch NADD (Network Archiving Design & Digital Culture), V2_ commissioned three researchers to write an essay on a subject of their own choice relating in some way to the archive of V2_ and the history of the electronic arts. These commissions were presented as part of V2_'s monthly radio programme. Artist and 'accidental archivist' Victoria Douka-Doukoupolou focused on the development of laptop orchestras and the work of Cor Fuhler. Her archival research connected materials from the archives of the Holland Festival, Sonic Acts, V2_, the BIMhuis as well as personal archives. [1] Researcher Kiki Lennaerts wrote about the preservation of immersive media art, and the notion of 'anticipating obsolescence'. [2] Researcher and writer Katía Truijen looked at V2_ 's archive as a space and memory for art and technology, and speculated how V2_ reflected on this throughout its 40 years of existence. [3]

Indicative of the interest of these emerging researchers, all the contributions unearthed some aspects of a history of V2_ that are not often highlighted, or that are overlooked or forgotten (even by people who work at V2_). This further suggests the importance of such efforts to keep an archive 'alive', and bring it into contact with different contexts, in order to produce new views and new meanings. By doing so, archival research can produce new perspectives on the interplay between technology, the arts and society, that are relevant for now and the future.

Acknowledgements

References

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[3] Kiki Lennaerts: "Anticipating Obsolescence", online essay, accessed April 20, 2023, https://v2.nl/articles/anticipating-obsolescence

Biography

Arie Altena is archive editor at V2_ and the author of *Wat is community art?* (2016) and *40 Years of V2_* (2022).

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