CONTENT

METHODS OF PRESERVATION

Variable Media Network,
Guggenheim Foundation New York and Daniel Langlois Foundation Montreal
(qutation from: http://www.variablemedia.net/e/introduction/index.html)

The variable media paradigm allows artists to choose from four strategies to tackle the obsolescence of a particular medium, such as the bulbs of Dan Flavin's fluorescent light installations.

Storage
The most conservative collecting strategy - the default strategy for most museums - is to store a work physically, whether that means mothballing dedicated equipment or archiving digital files on disk. Storing one of Flavin's fluorescent light installations simply means buying a supply of the out-of-production bulbs and putting them in a crate. The major disadvantage of storing obsolescent materials is that the artwork will expire once these ephemeral materials cease to function.

Emulation
To emulate a work is to devise a way of imitating the original look of the piece by completely different means. Emulating a Flavin fluorescent light installation would require custom-building fluorescent bulbs that produce the same light as and resemble the physical appearance of the original bulbs. Possible disadvantages of emulation include prohibitive expensive and inconsistency with the artist's intent. For example, Flavin deliberately chose to use ordinary off-the-shelf components rather than esoteric materials or techniques.

Migration
To migrate an artwork involves upgrading equipment and source material. The obsolete fluorescent bulbs of Flavin's light installation could be upgraded to fluorescent or halogen lights of comparable hue and brightness. The major disadvantage of migration is the original appearance of the artwork will probably change in its new medium. Even if state-of-the-art fixtures cast similar light to Flavin's originals, the actual fixtures are likely to look different.

Reinterpretation
The most radical preservation strategy is to reinterpret the work each time it is re-created. To reinterpret a Flavin light installation would mean to ask what contempo-rary medium would have the metaphoric value of fluorescent light in the 1960s. Reinterpretation is a dangerous technique when not warranted by the artist, but it may be the only way to re-create performance, installation, or networked art designed to vary with context.

EMULATION

Tilman Baumgärtel, Berlin
Abstract / Lecture

Currently, emulation is regarded as an effective method of preserving contemporary digital artefacts affected by "bitrot" from decay. But is it actually possible to preserve and use software independently of its hardware in a meaningful way? What does it mean in terms of media theory when such a complex medium as the computer is capable of "emulating" its own past? What does this mean with regard to cultural production and the appropriation of our own (computer) past? Looking at the history of cinema we see that, with technical media, it is never only the "software", but also additionally the media dispositif that is preserved. However, computer technology has so far refused to develop such a dispositif that goes beyond the Von Neumann architecture. Under these circumstances, current efforts to emulate software solely by means of software have a certain Platonism about them...

Jeff Rothenberg, Santa Monica
Abstract / Lecture: Digital Art Will Last Forever – Or Five Years, Whichever Comes First

Information technology is revolutionizing records, data, documents and art works, yet the storage media, software and computers required to interpret and render such digital artifacts quickly become obsolete and unusable. How will future generations be able to experience our digital art? Standards alone cannot preserve digital artifacts in usable form for very long, and migration converts them into new forms, rather than preserving them. Computer Science researcher Jeff Rothenberg will present an overview of this subject, attempting to provide some insight into the fundamental nature of digital artifacts in order to show why preserving them is so difficult. He will then discuss the advantages and limitations of the various solutions that have been proposed so far.

INSTALLATIVE MEDIA ART / DOCUMENTATION

Agathe Jarczyk, Bern / Ulrich Stürmer, Bern
Abstract: Documenting space-dependent and time-dependent installations
(Context: Case study on Diana Thater. The best animals are the flat animals)

The aim of this work is to develop a restorative documentation for an installation that depends on its location. Taking Diana Thater's work "The best animals are the flat animals (Version #1)" as an example, the discussion focuses on what information may be relevant in such a documentation and what options are available for storing this information. Existing forms of documentation from other institutions and initiatives are taken into account. The main focus of the documentation is to objectify and standardise technical specifications, for example regarding the colour of the wall, installation plans, and technical

equipment. The documentation is to take the following main aspects into account. It will be discussed what parts of the equipment documented in the technical specifications are important for the artistic message. Moreover, to what extent the equipment employed impacts on the appearance of the art work. The discussion will look into the question as to the connection between the appearance and intention and between the technical equipment and integrity of the art work. The third item will be the influence of the appearance of the art work on the readability of the historical context. The aim of this documentation is to lay the foundations for various conceivable preservation concepts. Some of these preservation concepts will be discussed in the course of the work. The fact that "The best animals are the flat animals (Version #1)" is a variable and site-dependent installation will play a special role.

ARCHIVES + DOCUMENTATION

Anne-Marie Duguet, Paris, Abstract

Anne-Marie Duguet will introduce to the anarchive series and comment some aspects of the first issue *Muntadas Media Architecture Installations*. The *anarchive* series of CD-Roms, DVD/ROMs and Internet projects, launched by the Centre de Recherches d'Esthétique du Cinéma et des Arts Audiovisuels (University of Paris 1) is designed to permit artists to produce an interactive multimedia work that explores their overall oeuvre via diverse archive material. Beyond a data base it implies an historical and critical research which will ultimately constitute a record of a crucial aspect of contemporary artistic practice. Each title yields an original creation exploring the possibilities of the media, mainly dealing with other descriptions of works and the conception of an architecture of specific links. *anarchive* means approaching art works from new perspectives, generating original fields of dynamic discovery, daring to uncover unprecedented relationships and special pathways.

Caitlin Jones, New York / Alain Depocas, Montreal
Abstract: Variable Media Network

No doubt digital art poses challenges for curators, conservators and producers of contemporary art. The questions we need to ask of these new works, however, overlap consistently with those asked of many other works in contemporary collections. Conceptual art, performance and installation based works, film and video, as well as more traditional art object share many of the same practical, legal, and theoretical concerns as those facing new media.
The Variable Media initiative explores both new and proven concepts of preservation by looking at the behaviors of more ephemeral mediums of contemporary art production. The initiative aims to define these works in terms of their medium-independent behaviors and to identify strategies for preserving artwork. For artists working in ephemeral formats who want posterity to experience their work more directly than through second-hand documentation or anecdote, the variable media paradigm encourages artists to define their work independently from medium so that the work can be translated once its current medium is obsolete.

Tilman Linden / Sakrowski, Berlin
Abstract: netart-Datenbank
http://www.netart-datenbank.org

The netart database started out as a students' project workshop at the Institute of Art History at Berlin University of Technology [...] and will continue to work in future as an association. The basic idea and aim of the project was to implement a database of net art to document and collect works and to preserve and present them as authentically as possible. [...] In addition, exhibitions will test and implement various concepts on presenting net art and related topics. [...] Based on an information technology understanding, the netart database model is seen as an abstract model of a excerpt of reality. Because of their mostly categorising and hierarchising effect, conventional archives would seem unsuitable for creating a realistic picture of the socio-cultural realm of net art. Alternatively, the netart database model of collection sets out to mediate net art and its history free of any value judgement and in context. In order to ensure maximum authenticity of the presentation and long availability of the content, it is necessary to integrate metadata in addition to the works themselves, and to document and archive technical net developments. In this process, the user is seen as an active component, generating new content as he does simply by using the database.

Sandra Fauconnier / Rens Frommé, Rotterdam
Abstract: "Capturing Unstable Media"
http://archive.v2.nl

Starting from March 2003, V2_Organisation has initiated the research project "Capturing Unstable Media", supported by the Dutch Mondriaan Foundation and the Daniel Langlois Foundation, on the documentation aspects of the preservation of electronic art.