

## Session Summary

Title	Obselete Equipment and/or Emulation
Type	presentations & discussion
Date, time	Thursday 10th June, 14:00-16:00
Organisation	Gaby Wijers, Netherlands Media Art Institute / NIMk
Location	Netherlands Media Art Institute / NIMk, Keizersgracht 264, 1016 EV Amsterdam
Guests	Johannes Gfeller, Bern University of Fine Arts Paul Klomp, artist, hard and software developer, teacher Dieter Vermeulen, freelance video conservator
Moderator	Rony Vissers, coordinator PACKED vzw

The parallel session organized by Gaby Wijers (NIMk) and moderated by Rony Vissers (PACKED) at Netherlands Media Art Institute focused on the inevitable obsolesce of recording, playback en display systems. These pieces, though not always physical components of the artwork itself, are essential to the future presentation of video-art.

Johannes Gfeller, Professor at the Bern University of the Arts, at the Department of Conservation and Restoration, was the first to speak and provided an introduction into the subject of equipment obsolescence. Describing it as a socioeconomic phenomenon that has a continuous influence on the existence of video art and that needs constant attention. To retain the functionality and physical output of an artwork, it is often necessary to keep the old hardware (especially the display equipment) in functioning order. His department at Bern University contains a collection of equipment used for reference and research purposes and Gfeller describes that when possible, equipment should always be repaired. If this isn't an option, pieces should be replaced or emulated based on research into the nature of the individual artwork. He also states that besides studying the artwork and its equipment, it is also relevant to research the museum practices of presentation and preservation in order to document and, when necessary, adapt them to ensure a maximum equipment lifespan.

Gaby Wijers discussed the Obsolete Equipment project in depth describing the two prominent dangers facing the preservation of video art: the obsolescence of equipment which leads to the impossibility of presenting the work in future and the replacement of equipment which can compromise the artwork's meaning. Because of its cultural and financial value, the subject of digitization and long term preservation of video art is becoming increasingly relevant. Research is done into technical and ethical aspects through written media, interviews and case studies, discussions and workshops with institutions dealing with similar issues during which questions are asked regarding the status of the equipment in relation to the authenticity, the life span of the equipment, the acceptable degree of loss and when to act. It has already been possible to conclude that there is a discrepancy between the level to which artists allow technological updating of their work compared to conservators whom are more inclined to stay as close as possible to the 'original' techniques. Also, in presentation practice, it is necessary to reconsider the handling of the artworks and length of time equipment should be switched on. Reducing this time may mean an increase in lifespan. The results of this first phase will be presented this summer. The next phase of the project is to start in June and will focus on computer based artworks.

Dieter Vermeulen presented Klaus von Bruch's *Das endes des Jahrhunderts* (1985) and S.M.A.K 's preservation policy. Both the artwork itself and its components were studied and the artist was consulted. Not all the original equipment is available, so a search was conducted for replacement- and spare parts for future use, though there were financial and practical limitations. Once the piece is reinstalled the artist will be asked to make a video registration of the work which reflects the manner in which he feels the work should be experienced by the audience. Emulation is conceptually not an option. Audiences should always be reminded of the old equipment in case of replacement through documentation. The artist even suggests to show the original equipment along the new one if the equipment would get updated. Vermeulen also suggest the founding of a museum network through which museums can exchange equipment amongst each other.

Paul Klomp used Jeffrey Shaws *Revolution* (1990) to describe a risk analysis system for technical components developed during the Obsolete Equipment project which exposes the technical systems within the equipment. An important aspect of this analysis is determining the most vulnerable pieces of the installation and what can be done to prevent a break down situation. The analysis is divided up into equipment pieces, possible failures, mechanisms, potential break down situations and the extent of function loss. These findings are based on statistics, common sense and experience. They will be used for decision making regarding the replacement or emulation of equipment pieces. For this analysis every system and component needs to be analysed and schematized. The risk analysis can predict equipment problems so preventative steps can be taken in future.

During a lively discussion the attention turned towards the acquisition of back up equipment for presentation and research purposes. The policy at ZKM, Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe is to collect as much equipment as possible, with numbers rising into the thousands. The panel doubts that this is the ultimate solution for the problem of obsolescence, because the equipment is still subject to the aforementioned decay and therefore the lifespan is still limited. It is however a useful short term solution, because it is easier to replace broken components. At the moment the importance of equipment is becoming increasingly recognized, inventory lists are made and the possibilities surrounding national or international equipment collections are researched. The emancipation of equipment and finding new ways of treating them during storage and presentation are important. Also, institutions are increasingly educating people to look after electronics, within museums, universities, but also educating technicians and engineers in conservation ethics.