

Cornelia Weyer & Gunnar Heydenreich

**FROM QUESTIONNAIRES TO A CHECKLIST FOR
DIALOGUES ***

The first person known to have systematically questioned artists about their techniques was Büttner Pfänner zu Thal. This was at the beginning of our century.¹ His initiative was not very successful: only three out of 200 artists returned his questionnaire.²

More than half a century later, in the seventies and eighties, several questionnaire projects aimed at a survey of the actual making of art were launched in Germany and Switzerland. The data gathered on these occasions are kept at various locations.³ Erich Gantzert-Castrillo, the initiator of the Wiesbaden project published the full set of returned questionnaires. Heinz Althöfer and Hiltrud Schinzel at the Restaurierungszentrum in Düsseldorf extracted material from their project and made use of it in a broad study on the conservation of modern art. Emil Bosshard of the Schweizerisches Institut für Kunstwissenschaft in Zürich, Wilhelm Stebler of the Atelier de Conservation et Restauration in Fribourg, and Ivo Mohrmann at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste Dresden evaluated and published the results of their projects.⁴ The following remarks focus on the experience gained at Düsseldorf and Dresden, as these projects are closely related to each other and serve as a starting point for a new initiative by the authors.

Between 1978 and 1981, conservators of the Restaurierungszentrum in Düsseldorf surveyed 442 individual objects. The information gained was stored on a computer in 1982/1983. The data still exist but have not been converted. Althöfer published a list of the artists concerned and the results in *Restaurierung moderner Kunst* (pp. 137-145). Here, we find information on the occurrence of certain characteristics like damage in correlation to style, material, optical appearance and so on.

For a consultation of artists, undertaken in the period from 1979 to 1983, thirty-nine questionnaires of relevant content were collected. Most of these were completed by the artists themselves and refer to specific art works from the collection of the Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf. The questions concern supports, grounds, techniques and coatings. Further we find notes on maintenance and possible substitutes for broken parts. Some papers contain questions like: "With conservation of modern art, the following problem seems of special importance to me:" or: "Would you eventually cooperate to solve the problem?" Although Althöfer and Schinzel were well aware of the importance of the 'iconology', the possible meaning of materials and techniques, no comments were asked on this subject.

Additionally, two strategies of investigation and documentation were developed: video documentation showing artists at work (five are stored at the Restaurierungszentrum) and numerous models made with the aim of "documenting the relationship between style, material, technique and specific vulnerability". Today, the Restaurierungszentrum plans to incorporate the names of the artists and the objects investigated into their actual database system.

The transcription of the complete stock of questionnaires does not seem manageable to us in the near future. In our opinion, the data from the Düsseldorf project vary in their practical value. The investigation of individual objects suffers from the serious disadvantage that there is no indication whether the information documented is the result of mere observation of the object's surface, an interpretation of X-ray analyses or chemical/physical analysis, or whether it was provided by the artist. On the other hand, the questionnaires filled in by artists, the video documentation and the models seem relevant. In future research as well as conservation contexts, they should be taken into consideration.

In Dresden, two surveys were accomplished by conservation students at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste – the first one in 1988 by Ivo Mohrmann, the second in 1990 by Katrin Meyerhuber. They reflect the historical moment of transition from the German Democratic Republic to a reunited Germany, with its important changes in society, economy and the arts. This might become even more obvious in the future.

Having been inspired by the Düsseldorf project, the investigators at Dresden looked for new ways. In 1988, Mohrmann distributed forty-seven copies of a questionnaire; Meyerhuber, in 1990, added two hundred more of a slightly revised version. The response was some forty sets of data in total.

These questionnaires focused on traditional art works, paintings and graphic works and requested information on materials and techniques from a practical viewpoint. The iconology of material is not mentioned – perhaps because this was considered less important in the traditional practice of art. But the authors were very much interested in the artists' opinion on changes caused in their works by ageing; in this, the Dresden surveys resemble the two Swiss projects of Bosshard and Stebler.

The artists were questioned on their individual attitude towards conservation and their interest to take part in it. The questions were posed in a way which seemed to concede the artist a certain right of interference in conservation/restoration. Wilhelm Stebler, however, explicitly warns not to misinterpret the value of the artist's opinion for individual conservation tasks: it is not more than a first step in concept finding.⁵

A second questionnaire was prepared by Ivo Mohrmann, though not used in the context given, which is suitable to comment on a specific art work. It was meant to accompany objects on their way through time; in case of need for conservation, the information gathered was expected to help with the conservation plan. As the Düsseldorf project suggested, additional video documentation was also planned.

The value of questionnaires is in their simultaneous view on a certain number of oeuvres and in the details they provide on specific objects. In other words: they allow us to become aware of general developments and individual characteristics. Re-evaluating the material gathered by the surveys of our predecessors, we found that only some consultations with artists were accomplished in such a way that we can use the results at some future times and places. The question arose whether the records do really contain what we and later users may look for.

As a result of what we learnt from past questionnaire projects and from our own experience, we made a checklist that can be consulted when preparing an interview with an artist. The list can also be used in other surveys to guarantee a reliable standard of comparison:

Checklist for interviewing an artist

- Information on materials (names, compositions, manufacturers, suppliers)
- Techniques employed, collaboration with assistants/other workshops/companies
- Meaning of materials and techniques, reasons for their choice
- Samples of materials, the artist's documentation of materials and techniques (primary, secondary), other places where documents on the materials or techniques are preserved
- Opinions or recommendations for installation, display, maintenance, storage and transport
- Opinions or recommendations concerning preventive conservation treatments (e.g. glazing)
- The extent to which changes in the work's appearance (as a result of ageing or damage) are intended/accepted, experience with ageing/damage, dependence of the work's meaning on the state of preservation
- Opinions on interventions, the state at which an intervention should be considered, the extent to which intervention is intended/accepted, experience with conservation/restoration:
 - aesthetic considerations
 - authenticity (which parts do not necessarily have to be original in view of the work's meaning)
 - historicity
 - functionality (in relation to the work's meaning, acceptance of exchange of parts to keep the functionality)
 - preservation of value (economic aspects)
- Earlier collaboration with conservators
- Interest in publishing this information

Note the time and context of the interview!

Specify questions to a single work/a group of works/a period of time!

In spring 1997 the Restaurierungszentrum drew up two questionnaires on documentation and registration of contemporary artists' materials and techniques. The aim was to make an inventory of the quantity and quality of existing information in German-speaking countries, as well as the accessibility to that information. One questionnaire was sent to 36 museums, restoration studios and art academies, while another was sent to manufacturers. The conclusions were:

- There is a need for information on materials and techniques of contemporary art.
- There is a strong interest in the exchange of data, but on computerisation of delicate information serious reservations exist.
- Access for a broad public is not in the interest of most owners or conservators, but almost everyone questioned thought a network open to professionals was a good idea.
- Most manufacturers keep information on raw materials for a maximum of 10 years only, although formulas are kept for a longer time.
- Most manufacturers offer their cooperation, and limited access to information, when approached with a special request – two manufacturers were willing to share data for conservation purposes.

Presently, the Restaurierungszentrum supports the Akademie der Bildende Künste Düsseldorf in its questionnaire given to artists teaching at the academy. In comparison to the projects presented above, the inquiry has certain special characteristics. While considering the various aspects indicated by the checklist, the interviewers aim at a dialogue rather than completing a questionnaire or strictly asking questions. They prefer concise foreknowledge as this can be gained by being in contact with the staff of the academy's workshop or by evaluating conservation documents on the artist's oeuvre. They also appeal to the artists' own interest in the authenticity of their work. All these efforts are meant to improve the documentation of information.

1 Adolf Wilhelm Keim, *Über Mal-Technik*, Leipzig 1903, pp. 97-98.

2 Wilhelm Stebler, 'Technische Auskünfte von Künstlern', in: *Maltechnik Restauero*, 1/85, pp. 19-34 and p. 20.

3 Addresses for archived material:

- Erich Gantzert-Castrillo, Ludwigstraße 64, D-63067 Offenbach
- Restaurierungszentrum der Landeshauptstadt Düsseldorf/ Schenkung Henkel, Ehrenhof 3a (1998-2000: Franklinstraße 41/43), D-40479 Düsseldorf
- Schweizerisches Institut für Kunstwissenschaft, Zollikerstrasse 32, CH-8032 Zürich
- Wilhelm Stebler, Atelier de Conservation et Restauration, Passage du Cardinal 2 D, CH-1700 Fribourg
- Hochschule für Bildende Künste Dresden, Restaurierung, Güntzstraße 34, D-01307 Dresden

4 References:

- Erich Gantzert-Castrillo, Hrsg., *Archiv für Techniken und Arbeitsmaterialien zeitgenössischer Künstler*, Bd. 1, Wiesbaden, 1979.
- Heinz Althöfer, Hrsg., *Restaurierung moderner Kunst: Tendenzen-Material-Technik*, Munich, 1985.
- Emil Bosshard, 'Eine Umfrage zur Erhaltung und Konservierung moderner Kunst', in: *Information, Mitteilungsblatt des Verbandes der Museen der Schweiz*, 30, June 1983.
- Wilhelm Stebler, 'Technische Auskünfte von Künstlern', in: *Maltechnik Restauero*, 1/85, pp. 19-34. (See also: unpublished dissertation by Wilhelm Stebler, 1984, Schule für Gestaltung, Bern.)
- Ivo Mohrmann, 'Maltechnik heute, Umfrage unter Künstlern', in: *Bildende Kunst*, 12/89, p. 49. (See also: unpublished seminar papers by Ivo Mohrmann, 1988, and Katrin Meyerhuber, 1990, Hochschule für Bildende Künste Dresden, Restaurierung.)

5 See Stebler, note 2, p. 21.

Introduction text to Seminar 14: Documentation and registration of artists' materials and techniques

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