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ART: WHO CARES?
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Assessing Risks to Installations Session Summary

Title Assessing Risks to Installations
Type workshop
Date, time Wednesday 9th June, 15:00-17:00
Organisation Agnes Brokerhof, senior conservation scientist
 Bart Ankersmit, senior conservation scientist
 Netherlands Institute of Cultural Heritage / ICN

Over 50 delegates attended this workshop to discuss the risks to modern and contemporary art installations and their components. For many participants this was a new approach to conservation and decision-making, but they learned quickly. An interactive installation from the ICN collection, 'Revolution' by Jeffrey Shaw and Tjebbe van Tijen (1990), served as case study. The participants first had to identify relevant risks by thinking about failures of the installation and deduct their causes. They approached the problems with great seriousness and enthusiasm, often making comparisons with their own collections. The focus in general was mainly on technical malfunction of components. But eventually other types of risk (loss of expert knowledge, misplacing in storage, vandalism) also entered the arena.

It was interesting to see that most participants regarded the malfunction of one of the components, causing the loss of the sound or image, as a serious defect, almost a total loss. Most participants agreed that the highest priority risk was the loss of the 'brain' of the installation, the software required to start-up the installation and creating the interactive sound and image. The migration of software on the floppy disk to more up-to-date media was therefore suggested.

Even though this workshop only served as an appetizer for the real thing, the participants thought this approach of looking at complex objects such as modern and contemporary art installations to be renewing and helpful. They considered it a good example that could be adapted to different situations. They remarked that the challenges that the conservator faces change, making it necessary to use business management methods to talk to decision-makers.

[Summary made by Rutger Morelissen, ICN]