

New Strategies in Conservation of Contemporary Art
Research Group UM – UvA - ICN
Application to Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research, Free Competition
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1. Project information

Title

New Strategies in the Conservation of Contemporary Art

Summary

Works of contemporary art pose particular difficult conservation problems which cannot be solved along the lines of the so-called ‘scientific freeze’ paradigm that until recently was the standard in conservation theory and ethics. In the last 15 years conservation professionals from museums and heritage institutions have initiated a series of international research projects, which have resulted in the development of instruments and the implementation of measures that have improved the conditions for conservation practice and in the trying out of new conservation strategies. Yet there is still an urgent need for scholarly research and reflection on the aims, procedures and consequences of these new strategies. This interdisciplinary research proposal aims to empirically investigate the impact of museum conservation practices on the material constitution, meaning and agency of a number of problematic art works and provide a philosophically argued model for conservation theory and ethics that is useful for this type of works.

2. Principal applicant

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4. Previous and Future Submissions

5. Institutional setting

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Maastricht University (UM)

Faculty of Humanities, University of Amsterdam (UvA)

The Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage (ICN)

Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis (ASCA)

Netherlands Graduate Research School Science, Technology and Modern Culture (WTMC)

6. Period of funding

September 1, 2009 –August 31, 2013

7. Composition of the research team

a) Principal applicant:

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c) Researchers:

Subproject 1, synthesis: Dr. Renée van de Vall (UM)

Subproject 2, PhD: vacancy (UvA)

Subproject 3, PhD: Drs. Tatja Scholte (ICN)

Subproject 4, postdoc: Drs. Vivian van Saaze (UM, ICN)

Subproject 5, PhD: IJsbrand Hummelen (ICN)

IJsbrand Hummelen and Tatja Scholte are senior researchers of the Conservation Research Department of The Netherlands Heritage Foundation (ICN). Both have initiated and directed ground breaking research projects on the conservation of contemporary art.

The Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage (ICN) was initiator and main coordinator of the research project, congress and publication *Modern Art: Who Cares?* (1996-1999) (Hummelen and Sillé 1999); main coordinator of the international project *Inside Installations. Preservation and Presentation of Installation Art* (2004-2007) (www.inside-installations.org) and founding member, coordinator and host of the International Network for the Conservation of Contemporary Art (INCCA) (1999-today), joining prominent museums such as Tate Gallery, London, Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent and Solomon Guggenheim Museum, New York/Bilbao (www.incca.org). Vivian van Saaze is PhD assistant at Maastricht University and a part time researcher at ICN, in which capacity she has participated in several SMBK and INCCA research projects. She is currently completing her PhD thesis on the conservation of multimedia installations. For Renée van de Vall: see 14.

e) Advisory board:

Dr. Alison Bracker (Royal Academy of Arts, London; Bracker Fiske Consultants)

Drs. Sanneke Stigter (Kröller-Müller Museum; Foundation for the Conservation of Modern Art (SBMK); MA Conservation and Restoration of Modern and Contemporary Art UvA)

Dr. Glenn Wharton (New York University, Museum of Modern Art, New York)

Prof. dr. Sally Wyatt (Virtual Knowledge Studio/KNAW, UM)

Prof. dr. Robert Zwijnenberg (Department of Art History, Leiden University)

8. Structure of the proposed research

We apply for NWO funding for subprojects **2, 4, and the synthetic project (1)**. The projects 3 and 5 will be financed by ICN. As the five projects form an integrated whole, we will present all of them, starting with the synthesis.

Title	Researcher	Institution	Promotor /Supervisor
1. Synthesis: Towards a theory and ethics for the conservation of contemporary art (0,5 fte 1 year)	Dr. R. van de Vall	UM	
2. Biographies (A): Media and materials (PhD project, 1.0 fte 4 years)	vacancy	UvA	Prof. dr. D. Cherry
3. Biographies (B): Site-specific artworks (PhD project)	Drs. T. Scholte	ICN	Prof. dr. D. Cherry
4. Stages (A): Documenting artworks. On knowledge transfer and documentation procedures in the re-execution of contemporary artworks. (Post doc project, 0,8 fte 4 years)	Drs. V. van Saaze	UM	Dr. R. van de Vall
5. Stages (B): Conservation and technical mediation (PhD project)	IJ. Hummelen	ICN	Prof. dr. D. Cherry

9. Description of the proposed research

Introduction

On the occasion of the first European Contemporary Art Manifestation *Manifesta 1* in Rotterdam in 1996, the Natural History Museum showed a series of wooden cabins created by the Dutch artist Suchan Kinoshita, one of which, *Hok 1*, was later acquired by the Maastricht Bonnenfantenmuseum. *Hok 1* was built of used multiplex boards and contained a table, chair and a collection of hourglasses of various shapes and sizes and containing various substances, like honey, oil, ‘museum dust’ or ink. After entering the small cabin, the visitor could sit down at ease and turn the bottles to see and hear how the substances would flow in different paces from the upper into the lower part.

On moving from *Manifesta* to the Bonnenfantenmuseum, *Hok 1* had to be adjusted to its new surroundings. The shape of the cabin was slightly changed, the chair was removed and a little lamp was added. The work also changed in a conceptual sense. As it was no longer part of a series, it became a singular work. Outside the setting of the Natural History Museum, its references to scientific experiment and time measurement became less pronounced. The artist did not object to these changes, as she considered *Hok 1* to be a mobile work. However, the change of scene also had some unexpected consequences. The museum public was not as cautious as the *Manifesta* visitors had been. The fragile glass bottles frequently broke and one was even stolen. The number of bottles decreased, changing the overall appearance and atmosphere of the work. After trying out various scenarios for the replacements of the bottles, the artist decided to lock the cabin. Visitors had to ask the guard for the key if they wanted to enter, a measure affecting the suggestion of playfulness that was characteristic for the earlier installation. (van Saaze 2001)

Problem statement and research question

The example of *Hok I* demonstrates some of the profound practical and theoretical problems involved in the conservation of contemporary art. Unlike traditional artworks like paintings and sculptures, installations like *Hok I* cannot be transported in one piece from one context to another, but have to be re-executed to match their new surroundings and will inevitably change in the transition. Frequently the measures needed to maintain the physical integrity of the work endanger its more intangible, transient and performative aspects. There is no once-and-for-all answer how to proceed in such cases. Each work differs and necessitates asking anew what it exactly *is* that should be conserved and which features and values are likely to survive and which risk to get lost in the conservation process.

This kind of contemporary art practices ask for a reconsideration of the aims and strategies of conservation and the tasks of conservation professionals and require a reformulation of the basic principles of conservation theory and ethics. It is the aim of this interdisciplinary research project to provide in both needs, which are urgently felt within the professional field. The project will investigate and compare the strategies that are currently being developed by museum conservators to cope with the problems that are typical for the art of the last 50 years. Starting from the premise that there are various aspects of a work that might be continued through conservation, like its concept, function, appearance or material constitution, and various ways to create continuity, like preservation, replacement, remaking, or documentation, it takes as its central question:

Whether, to what extent and if so, how, do museums try to create continuity in the biography of works of contemporary art by establishing, maintaining or severing relations between various stages in its career?

Societal and cultural relevance

Until very recently, the dominant paradigm in conservation theory and practice has been the strategy of the scientifically based ‘freezing’ of material objects. ‘Scientific conservation’ is based on the assumptions that 1) the principal aim of conservation is to preserve the integrity of the object, and that 2) this integrity is located in the object’s physical features and constituents. Therefore conservation should involve scientific research into the work’s ‘true identity’ by investigating the material properties of the original object. These are the properties that should be preserved for the future or that one should aim to return to by means of restoration. Preservation and restoration practice should, furthermore, minimize intervention and take no measures that cannot be reversed. (ICOM codes and charters; cf. Villers 2004; Muñoz Viñas 2005)

Obviously, there are many instances for which the principles of scientific conservation, minimal intervention and reversibility have proven their worth. The notorious example of the restoration of Barnett Newman’s *Who is afraid of red, yellow and blue III* may be invoked to remind that one should not discard their value too easily. (Cf. Ex, 1993). Yet as a general paradigm for conservation the scientific strategy is increasingly considered to be wanting, because it doesn’t meet the challenges raised by

artworks with a more conceptual, dynamic and performative character. Since the early '60s, experimental genres like conceptual art, happenings, performances, installations, new media and activist art have profoundly challenged the idea of the work as a fixed, immutable object, both by the use of fragile, ephemeral or degradable materials or of rapidly ageing media technologies and by the works' conceptual dynamics. Installations, for instance, may vary considerably in subsequent re-installations. Moving 'from one place to another', they acquire 'locational identities' (Kwon, 2002), shaped by contextual factors like site and temporality and the interpretations and interventions of artists, curators and visitors. This variability not only implies that works have no fixed identity, but also that they don't necessarily stop changing when they enter a museum collection, as the vicissitudes of *Hok I* clearly show.

From an art-historical and art-critical perspective, one may question whether these works actually should be conserved. Many site-specific and time-based works, in particular those of the '60s and early '70s, are explicitly intended to resist the forces of commodification and institutionalization operating in the capitalist art market and therefore designed to defy the status of a collectible 'art object'. In the mundane reality of artistic and museum practices, however, the picture is more complicated. With the passing of time, artists have become less reluctant to co-operate with museums; vice versa, museums have searched for ways to represent these influential genres in their collections. As a consequence, the supposed neutrality of museums as institutional contexts is, as it were, being questioned 'from within', through the conservation problems installations and other experimental genres are confronting their staff with. The museum proves to be another, and rather specific, 'locational' environment, as the ways in which artworks are collected, stored, documented, exhibited, researched, preserved and restored proves to have a further impact on their state and identity. New strategies in conservation indeed acknowledge that conservation is an intervention, a set of complex processes that change the meaning and often also the material condition of the work and its future state. (Real 2001, Laurenson 2004 and 2006, Buskirk 2003, Barker and Bracker 2005, Wharton 2005, Weyer 2006, Scholte & Te Brake-Baldock 2007, van Saaze forthcoming)

Previous research, scientific innovation

In the past decades several important museums and cultural heritage institutions have initiated innovative research projects in order to come to terms with the growing need for alternatives to the scientific approach, in close connection with the investigation of practical conservation problems and following an interdisciplinary, networked and case-based approach. What is still lacking is a systematic comparison and a theoretical articulation of the results of these case-studies. This research project aims to provide for these lacks by developing an empirically grounded and philosophically argued theory for the conservation of contemporary art and providing a policy and field report with practical recommendations. Its contribution to existing empirical and theoretical research will consist in the investigation of the relatively neglected topic of the impact of *conservation as such* on the state and identity of contemporary artworks, through the comparative analysis of a variety of current conservation practices. We focus on *museum* conservation because museums, as institutional structures arranged for the collection of heritage objects, presuppose the very principles that are contested in contemporary art

practices and therefore most urgently feel the challenges these practices pose to the established art world. By combining art-historical research with the research strategies developed in the context of Science and Technology Studies, in particular those of Actor-Network-Theory, the project aims to shed new light on processes of cultural heritage formation and the constitution of the art-historical canon. The history of contemporary art is usually written as if the artworks involved primarily matter in the instance of their initial appearance and through their impact on the art critical discourse of their time. However, their significance for later generations is very much dependent on whether and how their existence will be physically, conceptually and experientially continued (cf. Buskirk 2003). To a large extent, the project will argue, this continuation is shaped in the day-to-day practices of museum conservation.

Theory and methodology, programmatic surplus value and coherence, accessibility of sources

The project is designed as a comparative analysis of a limited number of ‘thickly’ described case-histories of individual art works with an emphasis on day-to-day museum practices. We have selected works of art of which the continuity is endangered by changes in their material constitution (project 2), by changes in their spatio-temporal context (project 3), or both (project 4 and 5). The heuristic model used as a framework for the description and comparison of the cases will be the cultural biography, following the lines set out by the cultural anthropology of things and the study of material culture (Appadurai, Kopytoff 1986; Merrill 1998; Gosden & Marshall 1999; Hoskins 2006; Latour & Lowe forthcoming). The central idea of the biographical approach is that the meaning of an object and the effects it has on people and events may change during its existence, due to changes in its physical state, use, and social, cultural and historical context. In contrast to the notion of ‘history’, indicating the generic description of changes of classes of objects, a ‘biography’ describes the trajectory of an object that is valued for its uniqueness, like a work of art, yet is embedded in cultural expectations with regard to its development (Appadurai, Kopytoff 1986) The metaphorical attribution of ‘life’ to an artwork may seem rather unscientific and, moreover, suggest a organic whole possessing a singular and fixed identity – a suggestion challenged by the art practices under investigation. However, as conservators themselves frequently use the analogy with living organisms to indicate the intangible qualities without which a work would lose its artistic significance, we have chosen to hold on to this analogy. The concept of biography enables us to describe – and thereby construct - the art works’ ‘lives’ as individual trajectories that nevertheless may show similar phases and patterns of change. Rather than as solid entities, however, the artworks we study will be considered as variable assemblages (Latour) of things, events and people.

The project as a whole is loosely designed as a matrix structure. Project 2 and 3 are ‘horizontal’, following works throughout their life-spans; project 4 and 5 are ‘vertical’, concentrating on specific biographical stages. Information about the cases is shared by the whole group in order to enable cross-comparisons. By looking for recurring patterns, regularities and stylistic mechanisms in museum conservation practices, ethnographic descriptions of individual examples can enable theory construction on a

'middle range' level, in between general theory and particular case (c.f. Wyatt and Balmer 2007, Geels 2007).

Empirical material will be gathered through archival research, interviews with museum professionals, artists, technicians and other relevant actors, and through (participant) observation of museum conservation practices. Access to primary sources is facilitated by contacts between the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage/ INCCA and the staff of relevant international museums, galleries and archives. Researchers and supervisors will meet at least every three weeks to discuss work in progress and exchange information. ICN will facilitate a shared database.

Subproject 1

Towards a theory and ethics for the conservation of contemporary art

Synthesis

Renée van de Vall

0,5 fte 1 year

The research projects initiated within the field of contemporary art conservation have followed a case-based approach. Museums have proposed problematic art works from their collections to be investigated from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. The reason for this approach is that contemporary artworks exemplify a bewildering diversity of materials and artistic strategies. The complexity of each conservation case not only asks for a particular combination of scientific disciplines to assess and where possible solve the problems at hand, but also for an individual balancing of different types of values in deciding about conservation measures. It is very difficult to stipulate common guidelines for general classes of works. Hence the more generally applicable outcomes of the projects have been the development and implementation of practical instruments to cope with the diversity: protocols for registration and documentation, decision-making models and instruments for the exchange of professional knowledge and information.

When it comes to the theory and ethics of conservation, many questions remain. A notable tendency within conservation practice has been to focus on the artist (or his/her representatives) as the primary source of information about the work and to develop instruments for capturing the artist's intent as guideline for conservation decisions. This tendency has its drawbacks. From a theoretical point of view, intentionality, and the artist as a source of meaning, are concepts that have been profoundly questioned in the philosophy of art and in art-criticism. From a practical point of view, reliance on the artist's authority has often proved to be problematic, for instance in cases where artists wanted to completely remake a work or were no longer able to provide reliable information. Although there is general agreement that the artist should, when possible, be consulted and asked for advice, whether or not and to what extent the advice should be followed differs from case to case.

The synthetic project proposes to formulate a conservation theory that is consistent with this case-based approach. Research projects like *Modern Art Who Cares?* implicitly proceed along the lines of moral casuistry (van de Vall 1999), an approach of moral reasoning based on the theory and practice of medieval Catholic moral consultation that has recently been revived in the field of medical and bioethics (Jonsen and Toulmin

1988; Brody 2003; Cherry and Smith Iltis 2007). Rather than understanding moral reasoning as a theoretical science, a body of sure knowledge (*episteme*) based on general principles, the casuist approach treats it as a form of practical wisdom (*phronesis*) starting from the details and circumstances of particular situations. Moral casuistry does not exclude rules, but understands them as guidelines that derive their intelligibility from concrete paradigmatic cases. By comparing the similarities and differences of the problem at hand with relevant paradigmatic examples it seeks to find out whether the former may be resolved in a like manner or not. Major tools in this approach are the development of a moral taxonomy, ‘a detailed and methodical map of morally significant likenesses and differences’ (Jonsen and Toulmin, 14) and the development of practical experience enabling professionals to understand how adherence to specific rules has worked out in the course of people’s (in this case artworks’) lives (ibid., 314).

The synthetic subproject will investigate whether moral casuistry is a viable model for conservation ethics. After reviewing existing literature on conservation of contemporary art, analysing and comparing the various theoretical approaches proposed, it will analyse the debates on moral casuistry in medical and bioethics. Drawing on existing case-studies and on the research of projects 2 and 3 (‘Biographies’), which compare cases that manifest pertinent similarities and differences and investigate how various museum conservation procedures have worked out in the life span of these cases, it will elaborate examples of case taxonomies. Furthermore, the synthetic project will reflect on the role of scientific and other types of knowledge, on technological articulation and mediation of knowledge and on knowledge transfer through documentation in the development of practical experience, using the investigations of projects 4 and 5 (‘Stages’). The question here is how to understand the specific expertise of museum professionals as they increasingly have to cooperate in, and even to substitute for, the creative processes of the artist. The subproject will investigate whether, rather than as an applied science, conservation should be thought of as a scientifically informed type of craftsmanship (Sennett 2008), relying on a professionally developed capacity of reflective ethical and aesthetic judgement (cf. van de Vall 2008). Finally, the project will reflect on the consequences of the project’s comparative case-based approach, with its emphasis on the empirical details of conservation practices, for the understanding of cultural heritage, in particular the formation of the art-historical canon.

Subproject 2

Biographies (A): Media and materials

PhD project UvA (vacancy) 1,0 fte 4 years

Promotor: prof. dr. Deborah Cherry

Contemporary artists are highly experimental in the materials that they use. So much so that the deployment of fragile, ephemeral, degradable, and temporally specific materials has become characteristic of the art of today. As a result, several works created in the past decades no longer exist in their original form: they have either degraded severely, are in the process of change and decay, or have been entirely or in part remade in more recent forms of their original materials. Equally, rapidly ageing technologies and the switch from analogue to digital signals the profound historical and technical changes within

which lens-based and sound works must continue to exist. This material condition calls into question contemporary art's potential for survival, and thus poses many practical and theoretical questions for conservation. This subproject will trace the biographies of selected art works in museum collections. It investigates the various approaches with which museums try to create continuity in the biography of a work of art, such as chemical stabilisation, substitution, replication, and partial or whole remaking, and asks what these strategies entail for the works' material, conceptual and aesthetical constitution. How did these strategies develop and what was the role of the various stakeholders, such as the museum, conservators, the artist, and on occasion specialist teams of makers and fabricators in deciding between possible options? How were questions of value, authenticity and originality addressed in the conservation processes? What material and theoretical differences can be identified between the original and the copy, between first and future states?

1. Degradable organic and chemical materials.

Damien Hirst, *Mother and Child Divided* (1993), Astrup Fearnley Museum, Oslo; exhibition copy (2007), Tate Gallery, London.

Mark Quinn: *Self* (1991), a.o. in Saatchi Collection

Several of Hirst's early formaldehyde works have now been entirely remade, because of contamination or degradation of the artist's initial examples. In *Self* and other examples Quinn uses highly volatile substances, notably human blood, which can only be sustained, and the work therefore continued, through chemical additives and/or refrigeration. Although Hirst's work was arguably deploying a material with a relatively longer life, the formaldehyde has either decayed or become contaminated. By contrast, Quinn is consciously working with an organic substance with a short-shelf-life and this quality is central to the meaning of the works, so much so that the artist himself initiated a series, making a new *Self* every five years or so. As each *Self* ages, it changes colour and texture, growing old alongside the artist. The research will trace the complicated lives of the works, from initial version, to more recent interventions and/or replication, examining and reflecting on the material changes to concept and execution through their remaking.

2. Temporally-specific transient materials from contemporary consumption culture

Thomas Hirschhorn, *Doppelgarage*, 2002 Pinakothek der Moderne, München

Felix Gonzales Torres, *Untitled (A Corner of Baci)*, 1990. The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.

Hirschhorn's practice is noted for his eclectic use of adhesive tape, aluminium foil, transparent plastic film, marker pen, etc., in frequently challenging combinations for the conservator, alongside the introduction of many 'found' objects in plastic and other materials. While much has been said about politics and content of Hirschhorn's art, the choice of substances and products from the everyday world is equally important, as the artist has admitted (Buchloh et. al. 2004). Many of his materials rapidly degrade, thus

posing the question about whether the original form can be retained or whether in future installations the re-made example can simulate earlier versions. At present his materials are still in production but this may well change, and conservation strategy seeks to arrest what may well be inevitable decay and impossible replication. By contrast, Felix Gonzalez-Torres (and the artist's foundation) allowed curators and conservators some leeway in replacing the sweets of the candy spills, so permitting a form of replication. But some candy spills specifically refer to particular candies, such as *A Corner of Baci*, making an exchange of materials impossible.

3. Aging media technologies

Bruce Naumann's *Rotating Glass Walls* (1970, Boymans Van Beuningen)
Kutlug Ataman *Küba* 2004 Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh

The transfer from analogue to digital technologies for storage and projection as against the preservation of older, sometimes obsolete technologies raises important questions about material state and forms of longevity. Digitalisation offers practical solutions to future life, and through selected case studies, the project explores impact of digitisation, and its potential impact on the quality of the image and projection formats. In Kutlug Ataman's work new media are nested within older forms of projection/display. In Nauman's case proposals by the museum to replace the projection equipment, agreed by the artist, have completely reconfigured the work from its first installation.

Subproject 3

Biographies (B) Site-specific artworks

PhD project ICN

Tatja Scholte

Promotor: prof. dr. Deborah Cherry

To what extent and how do museums try to create continuity in the biography of a site-specific work which is relocated from one context to another?

In contemporary art discourse the term 'site-specific art' is often used for works of the 1960s and 70s that were made to suit the place in which they were installed. The perception of those – often critical – works was inextricably bound to the here-and-now and spatial coordinates of the site. In effect those works could not be moved without being destroyed. However, art practices have changed. Not only have once site-bound works been made transferable - introducing new ways of 'commodification' (as e.g. illustrated by several prestigious exhibitions on conceptual art in the past), also new conceptions of 'site-specificity' have emerged that do not define works in terms of their actual physical location alone. In today's globalized art world, 'site-specificity' is often conceived as the social, economical, and cultural-political conditions under which a work is presented. In retrospect, this more 'fluid' concept of site is often applied to older site-specific works of art as well (if only, for example, to justify relocation of historic site-specific installations). Although these new conceptions of site-specificity do no longer imply that a work will be destroyed when it is moved from one context to another, its

relocation will still have an impact on the tangible and intangible dimensions of its identity. What conservation strategies are employed in this process of relocation?

This subproject will focus on the biographies of three site-specific works of contemporary art acquired by museums after their initial installation and investigates the effects of relocation for their conceptual and physical identity, appearance and experience. These three examples will be compared with each other and with a fourth case of an ethnographic museum object. The latter comparison is made because ethnographic museums have a long standing experience with questions of re-contextualisation.

The case studies will exemplify three types of site-specificity that can be seen as representatives of art historical 'movements' from the 1960s to the present (Kwon, 2000): i.e. the phenomenological (with an emphasis on minimal and conceptual art), the social-institutional (emphasis on social and activist art) and the discursive (emphasis on thematic content and narrative) types. By investigating the strategies followed in conservation and presentation the project will draw up an inventory of perspectives on the significance of 'site' in relation to the work's biography. Each case study will focus on particular aspects of conservation and presentation, e.g. *re-execution* (phenomenological site), *re-installation* (social-institutional site) and *reconstruction of the initial context* (discursive site).

Sol Lewitt, *Six Geometric Figures (+ Two) (Wall Drawings)*, 1980-81 Tate Gallery London.

Originally executed for Lisson Gallery (1980), the drawing was re-executed in the Tate Gallery (1981). At this occasion the work underwent major changes under supervision of Sol Lewitt. Being an example of the phenomenological type it introduces questions about (changes in) appearance of the work in subsequent re-executions; authorship and authorisation; and the role of the assistants in the process of re-execution.

2. Marina Abramovic and Ulay Laysiepen. *Terra degli dei madre*, 1984, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.

This work marks the transition in the artists' oeuvre from performance to installation. The social-politically engaged work consists of videotapes and props of a performance, and has been exhibited in museums, containers and a truck as a metaphor for the artists' physical and conceptual ideas of movement and travelling. What physical and medial transformations took place and how do these relate to the artists' intent? In such complex, transformable works what are the relationships between different parts, versions and mediums of the work, and what is conservation here?

3. Flying City *Drifting Producers*, 2003-05, Van Abbemuseum Eindhoven

This art-project has moved from a non-art to an art context and from South Korea to other parts of the world. It interrogates contemporary redevelopment projects in Seoul and evokes an imaginary space by bringing together physical and mental geographies in various media. The work has been presented in diverse contexts. As in many art projects today, the context of production is disengaged from its context of presentation. What conservation and presentation strategies are employed for the evocation of its initial social and geographical narratives?

4. *Trobriand Yam House* (Wereldmuseum, Rotterdam acquired in the 1960s)

The fourth case study has elements of the 'social-institutional' and 'discursive' types of site specificity. It enables a comparison of discourses and strategies between ethnographic and contemporary art. The *Yam House* was a celebration house of the Trobriand Community in New Guinea. From September 2009 it will be on permanent display in the Wereldmuseum. What are the underlying motives and strategies for the restoration and re-contextualisation of this sacred building, what is the approach towards regaining intangible aspects such as the power and rituals the building symbolizes?

Subproject 4

Stages (A): Documenting artworks. On knowledge transfer and documentation procedures in the re-execution of contemporary artworks.

Postdoc 0,8 fte, 4 years

Vivian van Saaze (UM/ICN)

This subproject analyses the impact of procedures of knowledge transfer and documentation on the re-execution of contemporary artworks. Similar to performing arts, installation artworks depend on the specification of their work-defining properties to be re-executed. Knowledge about the artwork thus plays a pivotal role in its perpetuation; what and how it is transferred has a considerable impact on the ongoing life of the work. (cf. Buskirk 2003; Muñoz Viñas 2005; Kreamer 2006, Laurenson 2006). In cases of works without surviving material components, this knowledge might be the only source on which future presentations can be based (Hummelen and Scholte 2006). Conventional documentation procedures have been developed for the preservation of tangible, material objects. They are not adequate to transmit the information that is necessary to re-execute more transient types of work, in particular the kind of embodied knowledge of intangible aspects of the works. Moreover, one of the greatest threats for these works is memory loss as much of this knowledge is only embedded in the minds of staff members and organizational routines, processes and practices.

Despite recent developments in museum knowledge and documentation management, an empirically informed insight in the limitations, possibilities and effects of documentation strategies and their impact on the transfer of knowledge has been lacking so far. This leads to the following research question:

How can we understand - in processes of re-execution of contemporary artworks - the relationship between knowledge transfer and procedures of documentation?

The project investigates three cases in which knowledge has to be transferred in different circumstances:

1) From artist to museum staff

Joëlle Tuerlinckx (Brussels, 1958): *A Stretch Museum Scale 1:1* (2001-2003) collection Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht and *Ensemble autour de MUR* (1998) collection S.M.A.K, Ghent. This case study compares the documentation practice of two museums

and shows how museums can differ on what is thought to be essential knowledge. Its central focus is on how museum staff learns from the artist to re-execute the work.

2) In the absence of the artist

Jason Rhoades (Newcastle CA 1965 - Los Angeles 2006) *SLOTO - The Secret Life of the Onion* (2002-2003) collection Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven and *Black Pussy Soirée Cabaret Macramé* (2005, 2006 and 2007). With the untimely death of Jason Rhoades' in 2006, the artist can no longer be consulted to define what information is important for the re-execution of his works. How does the death of the artist influence the documentation procedures and how do the caretakers make sense of the enormous amount of produced documentation? This case study addresses the problem of too much volume and the process of 'de-knowlegding' in a comparison of two museum practices.

3) Among museum staff members

Tino Sehgal (London, 1976): *Instead of allowing some things to rise up to your face, dancing bruce and dan and other things* (2000) collection Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, *This is exchange* (2002) collection Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven and *This is Propaganda* (2002) collection Tate Modern, London

Sehgal's works, which he calls 'constructed situations', break with the most fundamental convention of the visual arts, namely the material object. Instead of an actual object, his works are executed by museum attendants, actors and/or dancers, carrying out instructions conceived by the artist. As Sehgal does not allow for any form of documentation, the execution of his works rely on memory. The case will explore aspects of embodied knowledge and institutional memory. Its focus is on the circulation of knowledge within the museum, comparing three museums.

To allow for a comparison, each case study will be analysed in the light of the following questions:

- What kinds of knowledge are considered necessary by the various relevant actors (e.g. curators, registrars, artists, assistants, estate, conservators, museum directors) for re-executing the artwork and how is this knowledge documented?
- Do different relevant actors employ different types of documentation?
- What are the possibilities and limitations of the different documentation procedures and forms?
- What is the effect of procedures of knowledge transfer and documentation on biography of the artwork?

This subproject will follow the research strategy of 'following the actors' (Latour 1987, 2005), responding to the recent call for ethnographic studies of behind-the-scenes knowledge production in museum practices (Karp 1991, Clifford 1997, Macdonald 2001, 2002). Where possible, the researcher will partake in the actual re-execution and documentation procedure of one or more of the selected artworks. Discussion of the role of the researcher as an 'participant observer' is part of the methodological reflection.

Comparisons will be made with documentation and notation strategies developed in other art forms relying on re-execution practices, notably the domain of dance (cf. Forsythe 1999; Bermudez 2007).

Subproject 5

Stages (B): Conservation and technical mediation.

PhD project ICN

IJsbrand Hummelen

This project investigates the various ways in which the biographies of artworks are mediated by technologies of investigation, documentation and display in conservation and restoration practices. Since the beginning of the 20th century, conservation and restoration have profited from a proliferation of research technologies like photography, microscopy, X-ray photography, cross section and chemical analysis, Infrared Reflectography, UV Photography, Scanning Electron microscopy, multispectral digital photography, digital imaging and analysis, and laser scanning. These technologies make it possible to articulate different layers of cultural objects, in particular the technical and material aspects involved in the processes of their creation and change. With the help of digital information and communication technologies, these processes can also be presented visually in accessible and compelling ways.

Informative as they are, however, these sophisticated methods do not by themselves reveal an artwork's identity, neither do they provide by themselves adequate answers to the question how to conserve or restore a work, as the traditional 'scientific freeze' approach supposed. The relevance of scientific data regarding a work's physical constitution has to be evaluated within the context of an integral investigation of the artistic/creative, cultural, technological and social dimensions of the work's history. Technical mediation, moreover, is never transparent with regard to what is mediated; technologies transform whatever they scrutinize, record and show (cf. Ihde 1990; Latour 1999; Verbeek 2005). This becomes evident when traditional research, documentation and display strategies in conservation are compared with less traditional approaches. The need for comparative analysis of 'what' technologies 'do' (Verbeek) becomes particularly urgent in those contemporary art practices which themselves rely on sophisticated technological instruments and methods as part of the artistic process and in which reflection on these technologies is part of the work's content. As these technologies rapidly age, the question arises whether and in what form they should be preserved or replaced.

The project investigates three cases of research and restoration practices in which an unconventional approach has been or will be followed. The researcher has been or will be involved as a professional conservator-restorer in all three cases. Each case will be analysed as "a complex of socio-technical assemblages and networks" (Latour 1987; Hummelen, Van Saaze, Versteegh, 2008) and will include both an ethnographic description of the conservation processes and an evaluation of their results. Discussion of

the role of the researcher as an 'observing participant' is part of the methodological reflection.

1. Peter Struycken *Cluster Series* (1980),

The *Cluster Series* consists of a series of monochrome rectangles of the same size are sprayed by the artist with polyurethane paint on perspex in different colours and colour values. Conventional conservation would investigate the properties of the original paint disregarding the integration of the creative process of this series, namely that colour values were chosen according to the outcome of a *game* played by the artist. This study will investigate the relations between old and current (computer)technology, its effects on the making processes, materials, techniques, appearance and affect, and in dialogue with the artist develop a conservation strategy.

2. Madelon Hooykaas and Elsa Stansfield *From the Museum of Memory* (1985- 1988), (7 installations, 2 installations in the collection of Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam).

In the second case study the transformations in the relations of the scientific and technological features and the artistic artistic/creative, cultural and social dimensions of the work's history will be studied in a work where exactly these relations are consciously articulated by the artists themselves. The artists used the rhetoric of science in X-rays images, the material iconology of phosphor as a chemical element, for example, in combination with documentary photographs and video's of their travel to Hiroshima in these installations, which are remembered and described as 'events' in 1985-88.

The process of transformation of the 'socio-technical assemblage' in these installations as 'events' into re-installable artworks will be studied in dialogue with the artist.

3. Mondrian's *Victory Boogy Woogy*, (1942-44), Haags Gemeentemuseum

The third case broadens the scope of the project to a wider time span. Although not a contemporary artwork, it might be approached as part of an installation. For the making of this painting Mondrian did not only use new materials, like synthetic tape, but also applied unusual methods like rearrangements of cardboard rectangles on the walls of his studio. This study will investigate the construction of this dimension of Mondrian's practice, documented by colour photographs and contemporary recordings, by using analytical and digital imaging techniques. In 2007/8 the painting was examined by a team of scientists and scholars in a collaborative research project of the HGM, ICN and a European team of scientists, of which the researcher of this study was one of the initiators and developers.

10. Summary in key words

conservation theory and ethics, contemporary art, museums, biographies

11. Work programme

	Year 1 (09/2009 - 08/2010)	Year 2 (09/2010 - 08/2011)	Year 3 (09/2012 - 08/2012)	Year 4 (09/2012 - 08/2013)
Project 1	Theoretical development casuist model Article on new strategies in conservation	Draft chapters 1 and 2 monograph Article on biographical approach of art objects	Draft chapters 3 and 4 monograph Article on casuist model in conservation	Final draft monograph; Policy report
Project 2	Literature research 6 cases First drafts chapters 1 and 2	Empirical research cases 1, 2, and 3 First draft chapter 3; article	Empirical research cases 4,5 and 6 First drafts chapters 4 and 5	Final drafts chapters 1-5 and Conclusions PhD thesis
Project 3	Literature research 4 cases First drafts chapters 1 and 2	Empirical research cases 1, 2 First drafts chapters 2 and 3	Empirical research cases 3, 4 First drafts chapters 4 and 5	Final drafts chapters 1-5 and Conclusions PhD thesis
Project 4	Literature research theory and 6 cases Theoretical article on knowledge transfer and documentation	Empirical research cases 1, 2, 5 and 6	Empirical research cases 3 and 4 Two articles based on empirical research	Comparison case studies; writing monograph
Project 5	Research case 1 First drafts chapters 1 and 2	Research case 2 First draft chapter 3	Research case 3 First draft chapter 4	Final drafts chapters 1-4 and Conclusions PhD thesis

Work plan subproject 1 (synthetic project)

September 2009 - August 2010

In year one the focus is on the theoretical articulation of the casuist model, the analysis of debates around this model in bioethics and medicine and its applicability for conservation ethics, using existing literature on the theory and ethics of the conservation of contemporary art. An article on new strategies in conservation of contemporary art will be prepared. In this stage of the project, the empirical material will be derived from previous research projects such as *Modern Art Who Cares* and *Inside Installations*. (0,25 fte replacement)

September 2010 - August 2012

During year 2 and 3, the researcher will participate in the group meetings and closely follow the work-in-progress of the other researchers. Draft chapters of the monograph will be prepared. Writing of an article on biographical approach of art objects and one on the use of the casuist model in conservation. For this phase of the subproject the researcher will use part of her regular research time (0,25 fte).

September 2012 - August 2013

In year 4, the final draft of the monograph will be written drawing on the empirical studies of the other subprojects. For this phase of the subproject the researcher will use all her regular research time (0,4 fte) plus 0,25 fte replacement.

Work plan subproject 2

September 2009 - August 2010

In the first year a literature study on the artists and case studies will be carried out and a first inventory of the exhibition history of the works will be compiled. In this phase also relevant sources on material composition and conservation questions will be analyzed and relevant strategies for conservation and replication will be studied. Interviews with the 6 artists and stakeholders of the works will be prepared and scheduled. First drafts chapters 1 and 2 (Theoretical introduction and methodology).

September 2010 – August 2011

The second year will be dedicated to the investigation of the biographies of *Mother and Child Devided* by Damien Hirst, *Self* by Marc Quinn and *Doppelgarage* by Thomas Hirschhorn. Interviews will be conducted with staff of Tate Modern, Saatchi Gallery and Pinakothek der Moderne, as well as with the artists and other relevant stakeholders and material experts. First draft chapter 3 and an article on the conservation contemporary artworks made of degradable organic and chemical materials.

September 2011 – August 2012

The third year will be dedicated to the research of Felix Gonzales Torres' *Untitled (Corner of Baci)*, Bruce Nauman's *Rotating Glass Walls* and Kutlug Ataman's *Küba*. Felix Gonzalez Torres can no longer be consulted but a visit will be paid to the MOCA, Los Angeles. Interviews will be conducted with the staff of MOCA as well as the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh and Museum Boijmans van Beuningen in Rotterdam. First drafts of the chapters 4 on the conservation of materials from contemporary consumption culture and 5 on media technologies will be written.

September 2012 – August 2013

In the last year the final drafts of the chapters 1-5 and the chapter 6, Conclusions, on the impact of museum conservation strategies on the biographies of contemporary artworks, will be written.

Work plan subproject 4

September 2009 - August 2010

In the first year the theoretical literature regarding concepts of knowledge and the role of documentation in conservation practices will be analyzed. In this phase also relevant secondary literature on the case studies will be studied, and interviews will be prepared for and scheduled. Intended result of the first year is an article focused on the role of knowledge in re-execution practices based on literature research.

September 2010 – August 2011

The second year will be dedicated to the case studies of Joëlle Tuerlinckx and Tino Sehgal. Interviews will be conducted in London with the staff of Tate Modern (case study Tino Sehgal), and Rhoades' London estate at Hauser and Wirth. Research trips in Belgium are planned to: Brussels (interview Joëlle Tuerlinckx and assistants), Ghent (fieldwork at S.M.A.K. and interviews with museum staff) as well as Antwerp (interviews with Joëlle Tuerlinckx's gallery staff members). During the first two years the researcher is involved in the 'Inside Movement Documentation' research project (2008-2010).

September 2011 – August 2012

Research into the work by Jason Rhoades requires a research period in Los Angeles (fieldwork at MOCA LA and LA County Museum of Art, visit to Rhoades' former studio, library and archive Getty Research Institute) and New York (interviews at David Zwirner Gallery and private conservator Christian Scheidemann). This empirical research will be carried out in the third year.

September 2012 – August 2013

In the final year the research materials will be analysed resulting in a monograph comparing the three case studies.

12. Word Count

1999+3990 (5 subprojects)

13. Planned Deliverables

Subproject 1: Monograph on theory and ethics for the conservation of contemporary art.

Articles in *Art History*; *Journal of Material Culture*; *British Journal of Aesthetics*.

Subproject 2: PhD thesis; article in *Art History*.

Subproject 3: PhD thesis, article in *Restauro*.

Subproject 4: Monograph. Articles in *Theory, Culture and Society*; *Museum Management and Curatorship*; *Science, Technology & Human Values*.

Subproject 5: PhD thesis; article in *Studies in Conservation*

A policy and field report with practical recommendations will be the shared responsibility of all applicants under the direction of the principal applicant.

The researchers are (co-) organisers and participants of the conference *Modern Art Who Cares II* (ICN/ UvA/ SBMK) 2010.

An expert meeting will be planned in the third year of the research period (August 2012) to discuss first results.

14. Short Curriculum Vitae Principal Applicant

Renée van de Vall obtained a PhD degree in philosophy at the University of Amsterdam (cum laude). She works as an associate professor at the Faculty of Art and Social Sciences of Maastricht University where she is director of studies of the MA Media Culture.. She has published widely on philosophical aesthetics, the phenomenology of contemporary visual art and spectatorship and the intersections between phenomenology and Actor-Network-Theory. She was a member of the theoretical workgroup of the research project *Modern Art Who Cares?* and is principal supervisor and co-promotor of the joint UM/ICN PhD project *Conservation of multimedia installations* (V. van Saaze). She is programme leader of the NWO-funded project *Transformations in perception and participation: Digital games*.

Relevant publications:

- *Een subliem gevoel van plaats. Een filosofische interpretatie van het werk van Barnett Newman*. Groningen: Historische Uitgeverij 1994.
- Painful Decisions. Philosophical Considerations on a Decision Making Model. In: IJ. Hummelen and D. Sillé, *Modern Art: Who Cares?* Foundation for the Conservation of Modern Art and the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage. Spring 1999.
- Touching the Face. The Ethics of Visuality Between Levinas and a Rembrandt Self-Portrait. In C. Farago & R. Zwijnenberg (eds.) *Compelling Visuality: The Work of Art In and Out of History*. Minnesota University Press (2003).
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- *At the Edges of Vision. A Phenomenological Aesthetics of Contemporary Spectatorship* Aldershot: Ashgate, September 2008
- A Penny For Your Thoughts. Brain-scans and the Mediation of Subjective Embodiment. In R. van de Vall & R. Zwijnenberg (eds) *The Body Within: Art, Medicine and Visualisation* Leiden: Brill. (Forthcoming 2009).

15. Summary for non-specialists

De conservering van hedendaagse kunstwerken vormt een uitermate complexe problematiek. Sinds de jaren 60 hebben experimentele kunstgenres en stromingen als conceptuele kunst, happenings, performance kunst, installaties, nieuwe media- en activistische kunst de status van het kunstwerk als onveranderlijk object ter discussie gesteld. Het tot voor kort dominante paradigma in de conserveringstheorie en -ethiek, ook wel als het 'scientific freeze' model aangeduid, gaat ervan uit dat kunstwerken een 'true nature' hebben die met behulp van (natuur)wetenschappelijk onderzoek kan worden vastgesteld. Het is de taak van de conservering om die ware natuur te behouden, of daar door middel van restauratie naar terug te keren; dit moet met behulp van zo minimaal mogelijke en reversibele interventies gebeuren. Deze conserveringsstrategie blijkt in het geval van hedendaagse kunstwerken juist vaak ten koste te gaan van de conceptuele, dynamische en performatieve aspecten van het werk.

Verscheidene internationale musea en erfgoedinstellingen zijn zich van deze problematiek bewust en hebben in de afgelopen 15 jaar verschillende vernieuwende onderzoeksprojecten gestart die naar alternatieve strategieën zoeken, meestal door zeer problematische gevallen te bestuderen. De onderzoekers van Instituut Collectie Nederland hebben daarin voorop gelopen met programma's als *Modern Art Who Cares?* en *Inside Installations*. Hoewel deze projecten tot belangrijke praktische resultaten hebben geleid, blijft de theoretische verwerking daarbij achter. Het blijft moeilijk om algemene conclusies te trekken waar de werken in kwestie zo divers en complex zijn; elk werk lijkt om zijn eigen theorie en ethiek te vragen.

Het hier voorgestelde onderzoeksproject beoogt te voorzien in de door conserveringsprofessionals sterk gevoelde behoefte aan empirisch geïnformeerde theorievorming door een vergelijkende analyse van problematische cases in museumcollecties. Als heuristisch kader voor de vergelijking gebruikt het het model van de culturele biografie, zoals dat ontwikkeld is in de culturele antropologie van de dingen en het onderzoek naar materiële cultuur. Twee deelprojecten traceren de levensgeschiedenissen van kunstwerken waarvan het voortbestaan bedreigd wordt door verval of veroudering van het materiaal (2), dan wel door tijdruimtelijke verplaatsing (3). Twee andere deelprojecten concentreren zich op cruciale biografische stadia: dat van de documentatie en kennisoverdracht in het museum ten behoeve van heruitvoering (4) en dat van technologisch gemedieerde conserverings- en restauratieonderzoek, -documentatie en -presentatie (5). Het synthetiserende onderzoek neemt de praktijkgerichte en 'case-based' benadering van het bestaande onderzoek als uitgangspunt voor een conserveringstheorie en -ethiek door het bruikbaarheid van de morele casuïstiek voor conserveringsvraagstukken te onderzoeken en te ontwikkelen met behulp van de overige deelprojecten.

Het project combineert kunsthistorisch onderzoek met onderzoeksstrategieën uit het wetenschaps- en techniekonderzoek, met name de Actor-Netwerk-Theorie, en met filosofische reflectie. Het empirische onderzoek bestaat uit archiefonderzoek, interviews met relevante actoren als kunstenaars, assistenten, galeriehouders, curatoren, conservatoren en technici en in de deelprojecten 4 en 5 ook participierend observatie van conserveringspraktijken. Voor deelprojecten 1, 2 en 4 wordt subsidie bij NWO aangevraagd; deelprojecten 3 en 5 worden bekostigd door ICN.

16. Research Budget

(Only for projects 1, 2 and 4)

1 PhD 1,0 fte 4 years	190.424
1 postdoc, 0,8 fte, 4 years	199.418
0,5 replacement senior researcher 1 year	25.000
Bench fees	10.000
Fieldwork abroad	10.300
Expert meeting	10.000
Unforeseen	2.000
Total	447.142

Research budget fieldwork abroad project 2 (PhD)

Research period UK (2 x 2 weeks fieldwork)

Travel expenses	=	300 Euro
Living expenses	=	1000 Euro

Research period Oslo (1 x 2 weeks fieldwork)

Travel expenses	=	300 Euro
Living expenses	=	500 Euro

Research period Los Angeles and Pittsburgh (2 x 2 weeks fieldwork)

Travel expenses Amsterdam – LA	=	700 Euro
Travel expenses LA - Pittsburgh	=	300 Euro
Living expenses	=	1000 Euro

Research period München (1 x 2 weeks fieldwork)

Travel expenses	=	300 Euro
Living expenses	=	500 Euro

Total costs fieldwork abroad: 4900 Euro

Research budget fieldwork abroad project 4 (postdoc)

Research period Los Angeles and New York (3 months fieldwork & research at Getty Library and collections)

Travel expenses Amsterdam – LA	=	700 Euro *
Travel expenses LA - NY	=	400 Euro
Living expenses	=	2500 Euro *

Research period UK (2 x two weeks fieldwork)

Travel expenses	=	300 Euro
Living expenses	=	1000 Euro

Research period Belgium (1 x 2 weeks fieldwork)

Travel expenses	=	200 Euro
Living expenses	=	300 Euro

Total costs fieldwork abroad: 5400 Euro

* To provide for partial support for costs to travel and living expenses, a Library Research Grant from the J. Paul Getty Trust will be applied for, which would reduce the above mentioned sum.

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