CASE STUDY REPORT

Jeffrey Shaw & Tjebbe van Tijen: Revolution (a monument for the television revolution), 1990.

'Revolution' during re-installation in NIM/Montevideo in 2004

The installation entitled 'Revolution, a monument for the television revolution' consists of a man-sized column with a monitor mounted on it. The installation is placed on a round base made of compressed wood. A bar protrudes from the column; by pushing the bar, you can rotate the column. If you rotate it clockwise, 180 'images of revolution' appear, based on iconographic material dating from the same periods as the revolutionary events, thus offering an overview of two hundred years of revolutions. Since all 180 images are contained in one rotation (one revolution), and each picture can be seen during only two degrees, if you want to see the pictures one by one you have to turn the column very slowly. If you turn it faster, you see nothing but a vague blur of images of revolutions. If you push the bar anti-clockwise, the monitor screen shows a millstone grinding grain to flour. The viewer is an essential part of the installation, without the viewer nothing happens.

'Revolution' was created for the travelling exhibition 'Imago, fin de siècle in Dutch contemporary art' (1990) as co-production between the Netherlands Office for Fine Arts (RBK, now Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage, ICN) and Netherlands Media Art Institute Montevideo/TBA.

'Revolution' was acquired in 1990 by ICN. After the 'Imago tour' technical devices (such as laserdisc player, monitor and speakers) became part of the audiovisual collection of NIM/Montevideo. A laserdisc containing images for 'Revolution', as well as for other Imago's works of art, were stored with Montevideo.

Focus of the case study

1. To document and register the installation.
2. To draft guidelines (a manual) for re-installation.
3. To explore how best to preserve custom made and obsolete elements.
4. To develop a strategy for long term conservation (emulation plan)

1. Documentation and registration

As 'Revolution' had long been in storage, its current condition was unknown, the main question being: does the installation still work? And what do we need to do to make it function again? The existing registration and documentation, which were incomplete, were checked and assessed. It turned out, that only minor instructions for the installation of 'Revolution' were available.
The team also searched for any existing visual material from previous installations.
In 2004 the work was asked on loan for an exhibition in Graz, Austria and Basel, Switzerland. A trial installation was arranged in Montevideo to make clear whether the work could be sent on loan for a period of six months.
While the installation was being set up, its re-documentation began immediately: all the components were registered in detail, photographs were made of them, and instructions for setting up the installation itself were drafted. Apart from this, the most vulnerable parts were identified and a list of questions and items to be addressed was compiled. This was the basis for the subsequent investigation.
During a second trial installation in 2006 the team took part in a risk assessment session in order to identify the high risk elements of the installation.

1.a Artists' Participation

As part of the documentation and registration, the artists have been consulted as well. In the beginning of the project Jeffrey Shaw was contacted by e-mail. He suggested to forget about the obsolete techniques and elements and already in the early stages opted for emulation of the work as a means to save it for the future (and wished the team good luck with this enterprise….).

Apart from this an interview was conducted with Tjebbe van Tijen, who as an outcome of this case-study has more clearly been identified as co-author of the work. Tjebbe van Tijen was mainly responsible for the images that can be seen in the installation 'Revolution'. From this interview, it became clear that many people have worked on this project and that the entire project was much more far-stretching than the installation 'Revolution' that has been investigated in this case-study.

Tjebbe van Tijen and Jeffrey Shaw developed the concept for their revolution-project in 1987 for the bicentenaire, the two-hundred years commemoration day, of the French Revolution. In this concept, named "An Imaginary Museum of Revolution" the project would comprise of man-sized statues, little models of statues in vending-machines that could be bought and subsequently a 'multi-media terminal' with a touchscreen. This could be activated by the purchased revolutionary monument and the user could explore an audiovisual database concerning these 200 revolutions.

A lot of research was done on revolutions, images of revolutions, battle songs, symbols and the persons associated with the revolutions. Many hardware-based computercollages were made based on this research.

This first concept has never been realised. A preliminary stage of the project has been shown in The Hague in 1988 and in Linz in 1989. On the request to make a work for the exhibition Imago in 1990, Jeffrey Shaw made the installation 'Revolution' based largely on this existing material. A lot of the images that were made before by or under the guidance of Tjebbe van Tijen were used in this installation and Tjebbe van Tijen added some new ones.

Computercollage for 'An Imaginary Museum of Revolution' as shown on the website of Jeffrey Shaw, www.jeffrey-shaw.net

2. Guidelines (manual) for re-installation

Instructions were drawn up describing the construction procedure step by step with photographs to illustrate it. These instructions are supported by a film version which shows the setting up and dismantling of the installation in accelerated motion.

3. Preservation of custom made and obsolete elements

The installation can be divided in two different parts: the sculpture (the column, the pashing bar etc.) and the electronics. The technology that was used is now more than 15 years old and some flaws start to show. Several parts can not be expected to last much longer or to be replaceable when needed. Apart from this, some crucial elements of the technology in this installation were custom made or adapted and not replaceable at all.

All images of 'Revolution' are stored on laser disc. Laser disc technology was ''state of the art'' but is now obsolete. In case this technology would fail or if the disc and copies would be damaged or lost, the installation would stop functioning. The other vital element for sound, image and interactivity of 'Revolution' is the custom made

'Comlink' or Eprom audio player of which the source code is unknown. Preservation is only a temporary solution, so emulation or at least an emulation plan ''in case of'' seemed to be the best strategy.

As mentioned earlier Jeffrey Shaw suggested to "forget about the video disc player and play all the images back from a computer […] Also the audio should come from this computer." It is clear that emulation is in line with the ideas of the artist.

4. Long term conservation strategy

The case study team hired the help of specialist Paul Klomp in order to research the possibilities of an emulation plan as a means of conserving the installation long term. Klomp investigated in depth the electronics that generate the image, register the movement and react by generating sound and image. He made an analysis of the interactive, image and sound elements on their own and in relation to each other.
One of his first conclusions was, that even if the installation was stored accurately, the installation would not last longer than approximately twenty years.
Because schemes and a source code of neither the electronics nor the used software were available, Klomp used the ''black box principle'' to analyse the behaviour of the used technique. This means only the in- and outgoing signals are being analysed.
To be able to emulate the installation, the video- and audio material were digitally preserved and the exact way in which the installation reacts and interacts was recorded.
The hardware of the installation was emulated on the basis of this analysis and functions in a totally different way compared to the original hardware. The emulated ''replacement'' does not have to function according the current protocol, as long as the emulated installation has the same behaviour as the original installation.
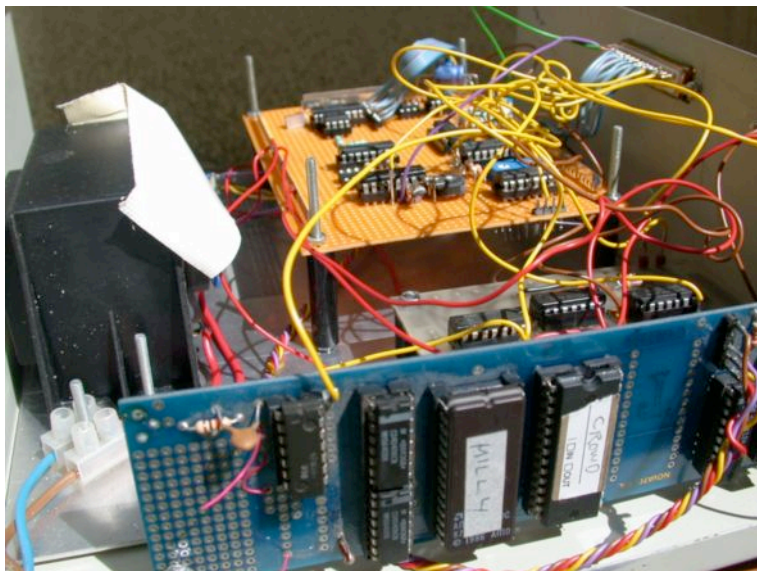
Insides of the "Black Box" : the Eprom audioplayer

Results

A complete registration of the installation was made according to the installation registration model designed by Montevideo. Based on this model, registration includes not only a description and material specifications of each component, but also a description of the properties, function and meaning of that particular component. The video data were registered and documented. The context and setting in which this work was created and the exhibition history have been researched and documented. Because of the results of the first trial installation, the installation has been on loan to the exhibition ''Moving parts'' in Graz and Basel for six months. Precautionary steps for preserving the installation when the ''old school'' technique will finally wear out have been taken. The emulated version is ready to takeover if needed.

Lessons learnt

Without the existence of the ''Inside Installations'' project we would never have been able to explore an installation in detail. We all have benefited from working closely as a team with many different specialists (curators, conservators, conservation researchers, archivists, technical- and new media specialists). Some of the results will have implications for the conservation of a wide range of installations and will prove to be fruitful as we move on to other installations in our collections. Other problems, such as the life span of monitors and storage and maintenance guidelines for hardware and software elements of installations to name a few, remain to be further researched.

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