

Interview about video documentation

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Case study	Thomas Hirschhorn, <i>Doppelgarage</i> (2002)

How do you use video documentation in your daily practice as a conservator of installations? And what are the main advantages of using video documentation for this kind of work?

For conservation purposes, video does indeed lend itself to capturing complicated processes; particularly during installation and de-installation. However, text and photographs can also be sufficient if done correctly. Video is also a good medium to show a general public what is involved in such processes.

Choosing video over photography can also depend on the kind of work it is. For kinetic works by Tinguely for example, a conservator would be lost without video footage of how the installations move.

Actually I don't use video documentation on a daily basis. Personally I don't like video documentation all that much. I think photographs are easier to access and can be more objective than video which is probably due to the fact, that up to now we have more experience with photo documentation. For example, I viewed a video made of the *Doppelgarage* during its first installation in the Arndt & Partner gallery in Berlin. Somebody walked through the two walk-in units of *Doppelgarage* and filmed his personal view. This video gave me a very different idea of the work than in reality when we installed it in our museum.

The photography department in our museum that document exhibitions don't even have a video camera. They understand that making video documentation is a completely different skill to making photos.

What kind of videos did you make in the *Doppelgarage* case and for what purpose?

We made a number of different videos; short films of the installation and de-installation and packaging process, webcam footage of the whole installation process and short films to show the movement of the model trains in the installations.

For our museum it was the first installation process of *Doppelgarage* as it was acquired just before. The work is very large and complex. We installed it together with two of the artist's assistants, who had done this twice before. The assistants were in contact with the artist by telephone. On the last of the 8 day installation, Hirschhorn came to do some final adjustments.

Our intern Bianca Ratajczak was in charge of compiling an installation handbook to document the installation process under Hirschhorn's and his assistant's direction. As part of this she was asked to make as many photographs as needed. She decided it would also be useful to make short films of some parts of the process; which she shot using the same digital camera. The same kind of films were also made during the de-installation and packing process. Most films are used within the handbook, but they will also be used for public awareness and placed on the project website.

I asked a museum technician to set up two webcams to document 'from above' the whole installation process. The idea was to create this footage for public use showing that these kinds of installations do not just appear out of nowhere but have to be put together piece by piece. We made an edited version (10 MB) for use on the project website. I got the idea to do this because of doing this research within the Inside Installations project and part of our project goal is to inform and educate general public on conservation issues. Today with a certain distance I see this footage as a vivid documentation of the installation process as well.

While installing however, our museum IT specialist in charge of (automatically) turning all artworks on and off thought it would be an idea to connect motion detectors to the webcams so that the model trains would only start moving when a visitor entered the space. Eventually this system didn't work, for two reasons: the museum has too many visitors so the trains were constantly turning on and off and the trains were also quite sensitive to the stop and go circuit. The second reason was the artist statement when he came to the museum that 'the trains have to run, run, run.' I was also glad that the trains could run all the time because when the museum is quite and you approach the space of the *Dopplegarage*, you can already hear the trains moving around, even before you see them.

I also made some footage of the trains moving around. The idea was to capture the movement in a very general way as there were too many factors that affect the speed of the trains; dirty tracks, trains not working properly. So trying to capture a certain speed was not the question. This footage was originally meant for presentation on the website, but now I also see it as interesting documentation for the museum.

How have you stored these video and made them accessible?

The short films made by Bianca have been integrated in the digital version of the installation handbook; which is stored locally on our museum server. The handbook has been made in Word and within the text hyperlinks have been used to link either to large good quality photographs or to videos. If someone outside the museum wants to see this version of the handbook then it would have to be put on a CD. A paper version of the handbook is also accessible, but only shows small photographs and no videos obviously. The handbook is not yet integrated into our digital museum registration system. In theory it is accessible to all museum employees, however in practice it would only be conservators that access this information and then relay it to technicians at the time of a future re-installation. At our museum we also have the opportunity to store digital data on DLT (Digital Linear Tape) and LTO (Linear Tape Open) for offline archiving.

What was the most difficult part of the installation process to capture? Do you think you were successful in doing this?

All the installation procedures can be illustrated with photographs. So for conservation purposes the films are not absolutely necessary but do give an extra dimension to the documentation. For public use the films are certainly important as they appeal to a general audience better than text and photo documentation.

The installation process was long and complex. We have a lot of film material, much of which is not very useful. There is still some work necessary to sort that out. However, it was hard to know what was important to capture or not and so almost impossible to plan what to film before starting.

I cannot judge if we were successful. I'm sure they could be done in a more professional way, but to have the video footage is better than not to have them. We have to see how they prove themselves useful in the future.