

Video Documentation of Installations

by Gaby Wijers

"It is advisable to have ideas circulate, as for lack of gasoline, it becomes impossible for people to circulate. One digs ruin after ruin to try to understand the past as if one understood the present. What matters today is what I would call the Archaeology of the present, and video is its privileged instrument." Nam June Paik

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Research area: Documentation strategies

Special study: Video documentation of installations

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Preface

This paper is one two which together make up a guide for good practice for video documentation of installations and other artistic events. It is an update of the ongoing practice and research into (video) documentation of installations carried out by the Netherlands Media Art Institute, Montevideo/Time Based Arts (further referred to as Montevideo).

Created within the framework of the European research project Inside Installations: Preservation and Presentation of Installation Art (2004-2007) the guide is the result of collaborative research within a special study into video documentation of installations under one of the five project research areas: Documentation Strategies.

The guide is based on extensive literature research and an evaluation of around 200 video recordings of installation works. Participants of the Inside Installations project kindly provided their video recordings so this good practice reflects today's resources and expertise. Although the research focussed mainly on media or video installations, the same knowledge can easily be applied to other types of installations.

Each installation is different. Therefore, it seems inappropriate to suggest that a definitive set of recommendations for video documentation of installations could be provided. These guidelines thus must be seen as a collection of instructions and issues to consider for those who plan to make a video recording of an installation.

The two papers in this guide for good practice are:

Video Documentation of Installations by Gaby WIJERS

Guidelines for documenting (video) installations on video by Sami KALLINEN

The first paper is more theoretical and can be seen as the context for second paper, the more practical and technical guideline.

Both have been adapted for the web and are available as an online course titled *Video documentation of Installations*. The course includes numerous clips of example video recordings as well as links to further reading and a test to assess your knowledge. It can be accessed via the project website

<http://www.inside-installations.org/>

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Introduction

When planning to make a video document or recording a few questions come to mind that can be grouped together as: What is the role of a video recording within the overall documentation of an installation?

This broad question can be subdivided into questions such as:

- What is the aim of a video recording?
- What is possible and what are advantages of a video recording?
- What requirements should a video recording meet to provide insight into the installation?
- Which features should be captured to experience the installation and to which depth?
- What should be captured to make a re-installation possible?
- How could the installation's choreography and interactivity be recorded?
- What are possible scenarios?
- What technical equipment and know-how is required for video recordings?

Generally speaking, installations need a different approach in video recording and documentation than more traditional work of arts. A useful description can be found in the Journal of the American Institute for Conservation:

'...because of the performance aspect of many installations, conservators working with this medium will need to look beyond the material and consider that the 'heart' of a work might lie primarily in its less tangible qualities. Preserving for the future something that is above all an experience might require conservators to take a more fluid view of what may or may not be changed about a work, challenging conventional notions of accuracy and authenticity.'¹

Installations can be very different and often variable. Video installations, and especially closed-circuit installations, are often interactive works of art, i.e. the public has to be present, moving or positioning itself inside the work so that it becomes alive.

In order to be consistent in our vocabulary, we will use a working definition for installations in this paper, that is:

Installation art creates a visceral and/or conceptual experience within an environment.

- Some installations are site-specific: they are created to exist in a certain space. Typically, the artist takes the location into account while planning and creating the artwork.
- Some installations have performative or live aspects. Input/output, interfaces and interaction are important. (Interaction means that the spectator is regarded as an integral to the completion of the work)

Crucial to an adequate presentation (and experience) of such installations – now and in the future – is a careful documentation of the specific requirements for their (re)presentations. A task, that is complicated, due to the fact that the 'ideal' presentation is difficult to define, especially for media art installations. For media works of art, the original, 'authentic', state often varies in the course of different presentations.

One of the main questions thus is how to document installations and, more precisely, what to document. How to understand, capture, define and transmit the 'heart' of the art work? Do we concentrate, as in traditional art, on

¹ William A. Real (2001). 'Toward guidelines for practice in the preservation and documentation of technology-based installation art'. Journal of the American Institute for conservation, Vol. 40, no. 3, p. 226.

detailed descriptions of objects, artefacts, the physical material or do we describe the experience, the mediation of the sensory perception?

Since performances and video artworks exist, recordings have been made with the aim to leave something behind. In the attempt to create a document or 'reflection' of the work, photographs, films or videos are made. A variety of media are used to document installations so as to analyse actions and performances, or to promote the work, or to place the work within an historical context. Recordings of live projects appear increasingly as important as or even more important than the work itself. However, in some cases, when 'audience participation' or the spatial environment is the central theme, then documentation could never replace the work. Interestingly despite the fact, video recordings of installations, performances and other temporary artistic events have become common practice, research into qualitative video recordings and good practice on this subject is rare.

When documenting an installation work of art, different aspects play a role, like the installation's physical characteristics, its relation to and position within the architectural space, as well as its performative aspects, experience and interactivity (the audience as a participant/actor/performer).

Amongst the existing range of documentation methods, video recordings can provide crucial information on a whole set of issues (depending of the goal, scenario and/or realisation of the documentation):

- overall impression
- visual aspects of components
- relation of components
- relation to space/architecture
- sound
- movement
- choreography
- time specific aspects
- interactivity
- presence (and experience) of the audience

Research approach

As producer and distributor of media art installations Montevideo has a long history in the production, presentation and (re-)installation of installation art. Since 2002, Montevideo has conducted case-based research of complex multimedia installations including video documentation research on installations and other transitory artistic events. However, until now, no conceptual framework has emerged nor good practice on how to document an installation (including its experience) on video.

The research approach of our special study within the Inside Installations project was two-fold. It included literature research into current documentation practices (of project partners and beyond) as well as analysis of existing video documentation of installations. The videos analysed came both from case studies within the Inside Installations project as well as some from Montevideo's own collection of video documentation from 1976-2006.

The following case studies from the Inside Installations project were analysed:

- *Alberts Ark* (1990) by Bill Spinhoven, collection Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage / ICN
- *Revolution* (1989) by Jeffrey Shaw a.o., collection Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage / ICN
- *Circle Puppets* (1994) by Dennis Oppenheim, collection Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid
- *Clamp* (1995) by Franz West, collection Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo
- *Doppelgarage* (2002) by Thomas Hirschhorn, collection Doerner Institut, München
- *Liquid Time* (1993) by Fabrizio Plessi, collection ZKM/Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe

- *Notion Motion* (2006) by Olafur Eliasson, collection Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam

Installations in the collection of the Netherlands Media Art Institute are among others by:

Marina Abramovic, The Vasulkas, Peter Bogers, Bill Spinhoven, Lydia Schouten and Bert Schutter.

As a starting point we used the following installation documentation:

4 Case Studies of Media Art Installations (2003)

- *25 Caramboles and Variations. Birthday Present for a 25 Year Old*, (1979/1980) by Miguel-Ángel Cárdenas, collection Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.
- *Outside / Inside* (1982) by Elsa Stansfield and Madelon Hooykaas, collection of the artist
- *Are You Afraid of Video?* (1984-1994) by Servaas, collection Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.
- *A Word of Welcome* (1997-2007) by eddie d, collection of the artist.

In total we analysed some 200 video documents. These were viewed, researched and discussed in several sessions by the technical team at Montevideo who are used to make recordings; Ramon Coelho, Ward ter Voorde, Sami Kalinen and the results were evaluated by the curatorial and preservation team; Jennifer Steetskamp, Annet Dekker and Gaby Wijers.

General documentation theory

Traditionally, documentation involves three different actions:

1. Research: locate relevant data
2. Registration/description: put down relevant data
3. Dissemination: make data available

Leading questions for documentation actions are:

What are the identifying properties to be captured?

How can this documentation be structured into information?

What kind of documentation form is the most suitable for which goal?

Within information science three types of graphic visual representation in documentation can be distinguished:²

1. Verbal: i.e. text in all thinkable variations
2. Pictorial: i.e. visual: photographs video & 3D documentation
3. Schematic: such as floor plans, CAD (computer aided design), diagrams etc.

Please note that sound is not graphic, and therefore not mentioned in this listing, although in the scope of this research it is an appropriate form of documentation.

Graphic visual representation types follow a three-level framework:

Level one: components

Level two: relations

Level three: overall presentation, i.e. models for different use

Several approaches are being used to deal with these different types and levels. In theory, the best approach would be to find a method describing the work, its history and its (re)presentation(s), and use a framework to trace, collect, describe and classify documents and information. One could search for those frameworks that are in use in different disciplines like linguistics, psychology and informatics visual (re) presentation. Metadata

² Karel van der Waarde (1996), 'The Visual Presentation of Information', Reader Alfa Informatica, University of Amsterdam.

schemas are common practice in art documentation, but no schema would be totally adequate for describing an installation work including all its components, varieties and disciplines.

Current documentation strategies for installations

Documentation strategies and metadata schemas for installations have been explored in various ways. The following systems are currently in use by partners of the Inside Installation project:

- Museum Collection Information Systems such as The Museum System / TMS.
- Systems to document artist participation, i.e. interviews with artists or assistants, documentation of behaviours such as the Variable Media Questionnaire. The Variable Media Questionnaire is an interactive form linked to a database and designed to assist artists and museum staff in writing variable media guidelines. It is based on the Variable Media Approach, in which an attempt is made to describe the work independently of its media. The questionnaire is not intended to be exhaustive, but is intended to spur questions that must be answered in order to capture artists' desires about how to translate their work into new mediums once the work's original medium has expired. In its current interface, the questionnaire prompts questions for each inherent artwork, behaviour that requires preservation. For more information about the questionnaire look under 'Tools' on the Variable Media Network website. <http://variablemedia.net/e/welcome.html>
- Process documentation systems like Media Matters. Curators, conservators, registrars and media technical managers from the New Art Trust, MoMA, SFMOMA and Tate, have formed a consortium to establish best practice guidelines for care of time-based media works of art, and in particular the loan process. <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/majorprojects/mediamatters/>
- Document oriented documentation system like the Tate and S.M.A.K. system. Conservators from these museums are developing an index (represented by an html or Word document) linked to a hierarchical document structure.
- Checklists for describing the work like the one used by the Restaurierungszentrum Düsseldorf which helps to describe different media.
- Registration models like the one developed by Montevideo. Since 2002 Montevideo started case-based research about data registration of installations, which has resulted in the development of a model for registration of installations. This model was shaped out of existing models, developed during the project Preservation of Video Art (2000-2003) and the project Object 404 not found. <http://www.montevideo.nl/en/index.html> (Look under preservation>registration)

Research results

Various documentation strategies are being used for (contemporary) works of art:

- Describing the documents as bibliographical source ('bibliographical approach')
- Describing the physical elements ('traditional preservation approach')
- Describing the work in a media independent way ('Variable Media Approach')

As for video documentation of installation art, we see that:

- Describing documents and documentation of physical elements may be important references for questions regarding future re-installation, but such descriptions may lack a real detailed observation needed for the preservation and re-installation of installations.
- For this purpose, video documentation can be crucial (next to textual documentation), because it includes pictorial i.e. visual documentation and sound.
- The literature research further showed a need for the participation of the artist and a profound documentation of the history of the installation (past presentations), preferably structured in a database system that also includes other kinds of documentation, check lists, and models. The main challenge of documenting installation works of art is to find ways to describe the work both in detail as well as in a broad sense so as not to miss unforeseen issues.

Video documentation of installations

In this paper, documentation theory in relation to installation art is not further elaborated. The focus from now on will be on the practice of realising video documentation for installations. That is: how to utilise video to give insightful information about a specific installation, including components, context, and information on how to re-install the work.

Although video documentation of installations, performances and other temporary artistic events are commonly used in contemporary art, research and good practice on this subject are rare. On the other hand, in the field of libraries and archives accessibility and preservation of video documentation is a common topic of research.³ Also within the performance and theatre field research into documentation and video documentation takes place frequently.⁴ Those insights have been most useful in developing this good practice guide.

In video documentation, time and space are differently organised than the viewer experiences in a real installation. The ability to jump from a close-up to a long distance shot, for example is among numerous other ways to manipulate the documentation. A video will be adapted to the installation (content) on the one hand, and to the language of film at the other hand. Perhaps certain aspects are not very significant for the installation but interesting to look at. Also, it might be difficult to capture in video documentation certain distinctive features of the installation. For example, how to present an overall impression, visual aspects of its components, the relationship between components, the relationship to space/architecture, sound, movement, choreography/trajectory, time-specific aspects, interactivity, presence and experience of the audience. How to present different parts/activities simultaneously? What are the most suitable camera points, how to edit and when? These are too many questions to answer at once and they very much depend on the purpose of making a video documentation in the first place. The first question to ask then is: What is the purpose of video documentation and what would be useful scenarios?

Defining the purpose, budgets en scenarios

Video documentation of an installation can be made for different purposes, such as:

- Publication/education
- Promotion
- Documentation/research
- Re-installation

When defining the purpose it is useful to think about the intended effects of the recording. For example, recordings for publications and education for a broader audience explicitly try to show the main characteristics of the installation in an attractive fashion. Videos for promotion of the work are used to present the installation to curators and other professionals with the aim to include the work in an exhibition or festival. For such kinds of presentation, images that raise curiosity and are meaningful are needed, next to proper editing. For documentation and research purposes, the whole atmosphere and experience needs to be captured so that the viewer experience is included. For the purpose of re-installation, it is essential to capture the exact order of actions as well as the positioning of the parts in relation to an overview of the installation.

³ The North American Performance Archive & Retrieval Working Group presented in October 2003 current practices in "Capturing Live Performance Events"

⁴ PARIP's (Practice as Research in Performance)

It cannot be denied that guidance for the video documentation is often tailored to the available budget categories:⁵

- Amateur or consumer budget
- Semi-professional or 'prosumer' budget
- Professional budget

These budget categories represent an increasing level of available resources, and even more so of funding, technical skills and background. With each jump to a higher budget category, the equipment will be more expensive and of a higher quality. The results will reflect this high level and the skills needed for the documentation will be more demanding.

All scenarios have their own requirements for the equipment and process of recording, editing and authoring. Recording thus can be seen as collecting moving images in order to capture the installation; editing as placing them in a certain order and cutting out irrelevant parts; authoring as the process of ordering the edited images on the carrier, in a certain order and structure.

From our evaluation of the literature search and case studies analysis we strongly recommend to answer the following questions before starting a recording as they all have an impact on the recording process:

- What is the intended storage of the video?
- Who owns the final product?
- What kind of users will access the finished product?
- How will the resources be viewed or delivered?
- How will it be accessed and preserved?

For more details on defining purpose, budget and scenarios look to S. Kallinen's *Guidelines for documenting (video) installations on video* under the section Pre-production.

Furthermore, Caroline Rye has carried out interesting research into the combination of multiple sources that present art works on DVD because it allows showing more than one shot at the same time. See the literature list for details on her publications.

Categories

Based on our analysis of 200 video documents we were able to define the following categories for video documentation of installations. There are two main categories which can be split into 4 sub-categories depending on their purpose:

A. How to experience an installation?

1. Purpose: to record the installation for the audience; to give an impression for publication or education.

For example: a video clip on a website
I/Eye (1994) by Bill Spinhoven

2. Purpose: (artist) documentation; to document or promote the work.

For example: documentation on preview dvd for distribution
Portrait (1992) by Peter Bogers.

⁵ idem 2

B. How to re-install an installation?

3. Purpose: 'art historical' documentation; for professionals, research, knowledge exchange.

For example: *Circle Puppets* (1994) by Dennis Oppenheim
Notion Motion (2006) by Olafur Eliason

4. Purpose: re-installation

For example: *Revolution* (1990) by Jeffrey Shaw a.o.
Outside / Inside (1982) by Madelon Hooykaas and Elsa Stansfield

As sub-categories 1 and 2 are based more on experiencing an installation and could be combined. Sub-categories 3 and 4 are more research based and could be combined as well.

Types of video documentation

In literature on documenting theatre on video, we found a distinction made between types of video:

a) documentation, b) adaptation and c) film, with an increasing level of interpretation (from a to c). These distinctions may also be used for video documentation of installation art. Based on our analysis of 200 video documents we would make a distinction between the following types of video documentation for installations:

- Installation view

An (often short) overall view of the installation and its positioning in space.

- Installation 'registration'

A visual description of the installation, its parts and its positioning, often from a spectators point of view. The documentation of an installation on video could be considered as an account of a certain event, at a certain time, staged for an audience. To call it a registration the camera has to take the viewpoint of the audience. When using more than one camera and montage, we enter the terrain of cinema or television, which in itself is neither good nor bad. However, we should consider that an 'objective' registration of the installation could then be more difficult to achieve and new dimensions or interpretations arise.

- Installation configuration

A combination of multiple sources used to present more than one shot (i.e. different channels or source) at the same time.

Scenarios

We made a distinction of three common video recording scenarios:

- Camera capturing of the (de)installation process

This could be done using a surveillance camera as in the example of *Doppelgarage*. Or in one case we discussed with conservators from the S.M.A.K. who had set up a static camera to document the whole installation process and gave information on each step to take, components and their relations. As such videos are often extremely long and time-consuming to watch they are often presented not in real time but fast forwarded in the final product. Such recordings can be made without high costs and can be most useful. On the other hand, a re-installation process based on these recordings will be no option, there is lack of an overview and the recording is often not detailed enough.

Example: *Doppelgarage* (2002) by Thomas Hirschhorn

- Recording

A recording with one or more cameras in which, next to static camera views, multiple viewpoints and details are visible. This could be a more useful approach (than one camera capturing) for re-installation but it requires more

resources to make. On the other hand, the re-installation process based on such recordings will take quite a lot of time, the registration is often detailed without exactly pointing out the need for such details, and there is lack of an overview.

Example: *Outside / Inside* (1982) by Elsa Stansfield and Madelon Hooykaas

- Edited recording

An edited recording can give the possibility to combine one or more streams of visual and audio material like photographs, overview, and quotes from an artist interview; metadata, changing the recorded time aspect in the right procedure and give details to make the recording ready for use. The main question here is: how much information will you need and how will you structure it? Needless to say that an edited recording will be the most time and cost consuming as well as the most useful approach.

Example: *Revolution* (1990) by Jeffrey Shaw a.o.

The scenarios mentioned here are results of available resources and levels of technical skills but also depend on their level of usability.

Requirements for video documentation of installations

Each installation is different. To give a definitive set of recommendations for video documentation would therefore be inappropriate. The following recommendations and requirements thus must be seen as a summary of instructions and features to consider for those who plan to make a video recording of an installation. More information can be found in the *Guidelines for documenting (video) installations on video*.

We defined two main categories of installation video documentation depending on their purpose. This summary of requirements and recommendations is categorised under these two.

To experience the installation

Content and context of the artwork are basic features to be taken in consideration when presenting an installation on video to an audience. Starting with the artwork the aesthetic, conceptual and technical elements of the installation need to be captured. Next to this, the architecture and audience should be taken in consideration for documentation. Here an overview:

With the artwork as the starting point consider how to capture:

- Content

Aesthetic, conceptual and technical elements of the installation.

- Context

> Architectural positioning:

Architectural positioning /placement of the artwork in the space.

The individual artwork versus the rest of the exhibition.

> Audience:

Represent choreography

Represent interactive action; its effect on the installation and its effect on the audience.

Recommendations when presenting an installation to the audience on video

- Make an objective, chronological, true to life rendering (of image and sound).
- Consider the recorder (camera) as a spectator.
- Start the video recording of the installation with a (static) overview of installation parts and their relations, as well as the positioning of the installation in space.
- Do not only use a static camera; zoom in for details.
- Include metadata of the artwork (e.g. place and date of the recording).
- Use extras (audience) to illustrate and measure space, experience, effect.
- If the artwork is interactive include the camera and audience as participants.

To re-install the installation

The artwork, the order in the installing process and installation instructions are to be taken in consideration. Starting with the artwork the elements of the installation need to be captured in global and in detail. The order in which elements of the artwork are installed and how this is done needs to be recorded. Next to this the architecture and audience should also be taken in consideration for documentation. Below an overview:

1. Artwork

- Content: what should it look like as a whole?
- Components: what are the different elements

2. Workflow

- the order of installing the elements

3. Installation instructions including:

- architectural positioning / placement
- choreography

Recommendations for creating video documentation to re-install the installation

- Start the installation recording with a (static) overview of installation parts and their relation to each other.
- Include metadata of the work and exhibition places and dates.
- Do not only use a static camera; zoom in for details.
- Make an objective, chronological, true to life rendering (of image and sound).
- Make the recording for re-installation when the work is de-installed and play it backwards to use for re-installation (to avoid the hectic and insecurity of the installing process).
- Add voice-over or record the installation instructions while installing; the meaning of steps and or elements are not always clear and may need extra explanation.

Conclusion

Video documentation can be an important addition to the existing documentation techniques of textual documentation, pictorial i.e. visual documentation, because sound (synchronous to the action as important feature for experience), time specific aspects and perhaps even a residual atmosphere can be shown in a video. Research into video documentation is still almost virgin territory with no clear definitions and is in need for further research to investigate how video documentation could provide insight into the special relations of the installation with the architecture and audience, its movements and interactivity. Also the need for and the level of additional textual information next to the video documentation needs further exploration. It's a work in progress!

Glossary

Documentation Many definitions of documentation have been suggested. For this report the following definition is appropriate. The records which document the creation, history, acquisition by the museum and subsequent history of all objects in a museum collection. Such records include provenance and provenience documents, acquisition documents, conservation reports, cataloguing records, images, and research papers, both created by the holding institution and by previous owners or independent researchers, etc. Also used for the process of gathering this information. www.willpowerinfo.myby.co.uk/cidoc/guide/guideglo.htm

Capture In the media world nowadays also the word capturing is used for the process of documentation. To record or make a lasting representation of (sound or images); as, to capture an event on videotape. <http://www.webster-dictionary.net/definition/capture>

Information A definition of information is that it should capture the essential nature of the information phenomena in a precise description. While making explicit the similarities between information phenomena and other related concepts such as meaning, certainty, or knowledge, at the same time it should bring forward the differences between these concepts. <http://ils.unc.edu/~losee/b5/node3.html>

Metadata schema The simplest definition of metadata is that it is data about data. A schema in general is a specific, well-documented, and consistent plan. The related word, scheme means a loosely described plan. Schema can mean any of several specific things. In terms of documentation a metadata schema means a model (or list) of metadata. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metadata> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schema>

Record To record is to preserve the memory of, by committing to writing, to printing, to inscription, or the like; to make note of; to write or enter in a book or on parchment, for the purpose of preserving authentic evidence of; to register; to enrol; as, to record the proceedings of a court; to record historical events. In short: to set down for preservation in writing or other permanent form. <http://www.answers.com/topic/record>

Registration is the accurate positioning of, or the degree of accuracy in the positioning of, an entity relative to (a) another entity, or (b) an independent frame of reference. http://www.atis.org/tg2k/_registration.html

Representation It is generally agreed that people know and understand the world and reality through the act of naming it; thus, through language and representations (Oxford English Dictionary, cited in Vukceovich 2002). The term representation embodies a range of meanings and interpretations. In the context of literary theory the term is commonly defined in three ways: to look like or to resemble something, to stand in for something or someone, to present a second time-to re-present (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler 2002). Representation began with early literary theory in the ideas of Plato and Aristotle and has evolved into a significant component of language and communication studies in the contemporary world. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Representation_%28arts%29

Site-specific art is artwork created to exist in a certain place. Typically, the artist takes the location into account while planning and creating the artwork. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Site-Specific_Art

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