ON THE PERFORMATIVITY OF DOCUMENTATION AND PRESERVATION OF VIDEO INSTALLATIONS

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Written on the occasion of two Peter Bogers retrospectives, presented at the Netherlands Media Art Institute, Amsterdam, in 2006 and at the Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart, in 2006/2007

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Intro

This article has been written on the occasion of two **Peter Bogers** retrospectives, presented at the Netherlands Media Art Institute, Amsterdam, in 2006 and at the Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart, in 2006/2007. Both institutions have been looking for possibilities to show a series of installations that have been exhibited before. By being repeatedly re-created under different circumstances, the installations often changed considerably over time, both on a visual and technological level. In Amsterdam and Stuttgart, they have been adapted for the specific spatio-temporal situation. In these two contexts, different decisions were taken with respect to the question in what way they should be re-presented. The article is not so much an attempt to evaluate the practical aspects of preserving multimedia installations, but addresses questions surrounding the preservation and presentation of installation art on a more theoretical level, starting with an analysis of the work itself.

The video installations of Peter Bogers constitute an interesting context in which to discuss problems related to documentation and conservation, raising questions that are at the very centre of what concerns the preservation and presentation of contemporary art: what is the work in question, where are its limits and what exactly has to be preserved? What if the work consists of ephemeral actions or materials that are subject of accelerated decay? How to preserve something that seems to be destined to disappear? These questions have been frequently discussed in the context of preserving contemporary art in general, and, more specifically, in relation to conceptual art and performances. Due to both their site-specificity many installations, too, are questioning traditional strategies of documentation and preservation in a rather profound way. A common diagnosis is here that the fundamental challenge of preserving installation art – apart from the obvious physical challenges[1] – is to accurately re-present the original installation. Installations, like "live" events, can only be experienced within temporally limited boundaries and in dependence of a specific set of spatial parameters. If the piece is not exhibited, it is in fact no longer visible and cannot be experienced the way it was before. In order to make re-presentation possible, documentation has to be at the centre of any preservation strategy concerning installations. As in theatre or performance art, this documentation may in the most extreme case be the only remaining trace of the work. The particularly "performative" character of installations is quite paradigmatic for a lot of work that is generally classified as "media art", that is, art that has a temporal and processual structure and exploits the aesthetic and technological possibilities of the mass media.[2]

The installations of Peter Bogers could be called "performative" in several respects. Being trained in a sculpture department as well as having a profound interest in body and performance art, Bogers turned to video quite early in his career. In his interviews, he frequently states that, while starting off with "live" performances, he soon decided to do video performances (i.e. performances in which the designated audience is replaced by the video camera) because he felt uncomfortable performing in front of a public. His media art practice does not remain restricted to the two-dimensional, "cinematographic" images of single-channel video, but is extended into the space of presentation itself, allowing for a different type of experience. Many of his installations include object-process hybrids, investigating the relation between space and moving image, represented bodies and present bodies, rendering strict divisions on this level problematic. One could say that his video installations allow for the label "performance" in a way that is quite close to what is generally understood as a "live" body art pratice.

The idea that conservators ought to find a way of re-presenting the "original" installation in the most truthful way possible partly relies on the assumption that there is a clear-cut distinction between "work" and " document" or "re-enactment", i.e. original presentation and secondary re-presentation. The work of Peter Bogers does not seem to affirm the division between "originary" works and "supplementary" re-presentations, as many of his installations – presented as the designated work of art – are based on "secondary" images of a performance that took place earlier, in a different setting, in which he uses his own body as point of departure. This especially applies for his early works, ranging from Portret (1992) and Sacrifice (1994) to Retorica (1992) and Play Rev Play (1999).[3] The images are not to be considered mere "documentation", but are configured to function as works or events in their own right. Furthermore, the artist himself denies the possibility of a hierarchical division; the different manifestations of the work are equally valuable. In the case of many of his installations, there is no ultimate "work" to be referred to in the first place -- the work is the total series of realizations and, in this way, has an open-ended structure. It could be regarded as an "open system".

Preservation strategies that maintain the distinction between the original work and secondary re-appearances find themselves in a rather paradoxical place: at one hand, they presuppose the work to be something essentially unrepeatable, and at the other hand, they aim at the re-creation of the unique moment, to preserve what cannot be preserved. The work of Peter Bogers fundamentally challenges the concept of an "original" work as well as the idea that performativity is mostly determined by ephemerality and disappearance.[4] The question is then, whether a different understanding of the "performative" character of body art, multimedia installations and media art in general could lead to a situation in which the paradox of preserving the assumingly unpreservable (i.e. the ephemeral, the medium- and site-specific) could be resolved. If recognizing the fact that any attempt to re-install an installation implies preservation and alteration at the same time, preservation theory could open itself up for new possibilities of formulating the relation between work and document, performance and re-enactment, installation and re-installation. The tension of fixation and change, i.e. the paradox of fixation by change, could be used in a productive way, such that it provides a new set of questions, if not answers, in the field of preservation.

A first step could be to have a look at the art of performance and installation to see whether the notion of performativity can be reformulated in accordance with the characteristics of Bogers' work, which relies on repetition and repeatability in various ways. Three works will be discussed against this background: Sacrifice (1994), Ritual (1997) and The Unified Field (2006), which were selected because they each represent different moments and phases in the work of this artist; they all raise different questions surrounding the preservation of media art and multimedia installations in particular. Whereas Sacrifice problematizes the distinction between "performance" and "document", Ritual mainly addresses the variability of multimedia installation when realized at different occasions. More than the other works, The Unified Field focuses on the relationship between viewer and work, and the way that members of the audience become "performers" within the context of the installation.

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Chapter 1 **Performance art and video-documentation**

Throughout the 1970's, video was frequently used to document performances. As a relatively young technology (at least in terms of its accessibility and practical applicability), it was considered an excellent tool for capturing spontaneous actions and long-standing events. Film recordings had as a disadvantage that the material was expensive and the post-production time-consuming. In contrast, video was capable to deliver instant images and real-time accounts of what was taking place. However, whereas video had become a popular medium for artistic experimentation around that time (in terms of closed-circuit installations, medium-specific experiments and alternative television), performance videos did generally not qualify as works of art or performances in themselves. Artists applied video to document the event in different ways; sometimes in the most neutral way possible, recording with a static camera from a single angle, but in other cases more creatively, considering it as a possibility to reflect upon their work, recording from multiple angles, using more documentary-style editing techniques and voice-overs. However, in this context video appeared in any case as the "poor cousin" of performance art, having no characteristics of a performance by its own. This view, too, is based on the idea of a strict distinction between a primary event and secondary, supplementary documentation, in accordance with the assumption that performances are fundamentally unrepeatable events that cannot be documented without taking away its performative qualities.5

Scholars like Amelia Jones have challenged this perspective by stating that there is a "mutual supplementarity": not only does documentation supplement the event that has taken place, but the event is also what supplements documentation.6 The event cannot be accounted for as event if there is no documentation, but the other way round, documentation cannot exist without an event having taken place. This approach, in turn, has recently been re-evaluated in an essay by Philipp Auslander, in which he states that is not even necessary for an event to have actually taken place for documentation to function as documentation. Auslander demonstrates that there are cases in which the only space where the performance occurs is the space of its documentation.7 The author refers here to the theory of performativity as formulated by John Austin, which is still an important frame of reference when discussing the notion of "performance" and "performativity".8 For Auslander the real performative event is the act of documentation, functioning like the performative utterance "this is a performance."9

At this point, Auslander's reflections could also have led him to a series of additional conclusions about performance documentation, tied to the possibility of repetition (or the movement of continuous supplementation) being inherent to the notion of "performance" as such. In this scenario, the notion of "performativity" would not be determined by the idea of a fundamentally unrepeatable event, but by the possibility of an event being repeated. But how can a performance be repeated (whether in documentation or as re-enactment) without being changed into something different?10 The answer is: it cannot. This does not imply, however, that, if repeated, it would be changed into something totally different: we can still recognize a work of art as the work-as-performance and the work-as-re-enactment, for instance. This recognizability indicates that repetition does not have to be identical (which is impossible anyway), but has to be a form of repetition that includes the non-identical. Formulated in this way, there can even be repetition across media: a photographic document or video recording has enough similarities to the event it repeats to be recognized as the same thing. Simultaneously, this does not mean that there is no distinction between the two – instead, there are important differences on the formal, structural and experiential level. Talking about this inherent possibility of repetition necessarily includes the acknowledgment of dissimilarities in experiencing different media.

For philosophers like Derrida, who also refers to Austin in his essay "Signature Event Context" (1972), iterability (the possibility of non-identical repetition) is exactly what constitutes the performativity of an event.11 In other words: an event has to include at least the possibility of being repeated and/or documented, otherwise it cannot be accounted a performance, as giving an account of something already includes repetition. Every repetition of a performance – whether in documentation or as a re-enactment -- is a re-iteration of that very sentence "this is a performance." In that way, documentation becomes part of the performance, as it is a performative process in itself. Hence, video recording does not appear as the "poor cousin" of performance art any longer, but as a process that is co-constitutive of the event, rather than being a mere residue, an objective remainder.

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Chapter 2 **'Sacrifice'**

The work of Peter Bogers constitutes an interesting case in the history of video and media art, as it develops from performance, but does not treat video as mere tool of documentation. Although Bogers shifted from "live" performances to video, Bogers' own body remained an important point of departure. The video images actually convey a sense of intimacy that may not have been achieved if Bogers had performed in public.12 Many of these images are concentrated on a specific situation and, in this way, seem to share something private, coming close to the performer's skin and revealing something that normally remains hidden – without becoming solipsistic or providing any conclusions about the artist's actual life. In that way, the intensity of the image is conditioned by a "secondary" process of documentation, which seems quite at odds with traditional stances on performance documentation, normally considered something that falls short of the "live" event. Simultaneously, Bogers' video installations question the myths surrounding video in other contexts, in which it is often considered a medium that expresses a strong sense of authenticity, being 'direct' and 'spontaneous' (as for example in live broadcasting). With respect to Bogers' works the affective quality of the images is not associated with the "authentic" feel video can sometimes have when shot from a hand-held camera, presented in the form of raw, unedited footage. In contrast, the material in general is thoroughly edited and the presentation is conscientiously taken care of. Cautiously "choreographed" rhythms and patters are an important part of what we see. The images do not lack brilliance; it is not the grainy language of video-aesthetics we are confronted with here.

This does not mean that the images conceal their origin by delivering a perfect illusion; part of the presentation is the exposure of where the images come from, and how they are produced. In Bogers' work Sacrifice this tendency becomes rather evident. It includes several elements, among which a glass case placed on the floor, with a miniature monitor inside, and, at the top, a lens mediating the black-and-white images, giving them a bluish appearance. What we see is a mouth shot from above, slowly filling with water, as the artist's face is submerged. At a certain moment, the water level seems to lower, but the mouth remains filled with water. Then, the water disappears, as it is swallowed. Being presented as a loop, this process repeats itself over and over again without visible cuts. Behind the glass case, a big photographic print is hanging, showing the setting of the recording, the artist laying in a bathtub, behind him a metal construction on which video and sound recording devices are installed.13 In this way, the work itself reveals in a two-fold manner its own conditions of production, i.e. on the level of technology and with respect to the performative action. The work itself has a structure of repetition, of its re-constitution within and beyond its own limits.

Hence, the recognition of its processuality is key for the understanding of this work. One could maybe even say that this act of recognition is the decisive event initiated by it, the work conceptualizing its own performativity-as-repeatability. But what could this tell us about possible strategies of preservation? Taking into account everything that has been discussed until now, it seems quite obvious that the work has to be preserved in a way that guarantees the possibility of this event taking place. That is, both the internal repetition of video and photographic document has to be maintained, as well as the transparency of the technological frame. Changes to the technological equipment visible in the glass case (the monitor, the lens etc.) might be acceptable as long as it delivers the same type of image and does not mask its own technological specificity.14 Furthermore, the glass case itself would be a central element that has to be preserved or reconstructed in one way or the other, as it refers to a museal situation that is simultaneously questioned, as the work is somewhere in the middle of object and process, constituting an ambivalence that is quite characteristic of a certain type of (especially Dutch) installation art from the 1980's and 1990's. Like other works of this period, it is involved in a game of representation, confronting different layers of experience with each other, connected to different media. Somehow, the medium is (still) the message. It is therefore quite obvious that the way Sacrifice reveals its own frame and context has to be preserved, that is, the way the work exposes itself as performative event. According to the artist, this exposure could be understood as almost "religious", which refers to the ritualistic character of the setting and the strong sense of staging associated with the photographic image. In the Stuttgart exhibition this may be even more evident than at the Netherlands Media Art Institute, as at the Württembergischer Kunstverein the installation included dramatic lighting, making it appear almost like an "altar".

Following from the above, one could then say that the work Sacrifice becomes itself a case study on the relation between performance and its documentation, defining repetition as key element of performativity. However, the presupposition of a rather fundamental possibility of repetition can lead to problems in the field of preservation. Whereas in this specific situation, repetition is intrinsic to the work (although the structure of repetition itself remains quite inflexible in terms of future changes), other works might disappear when becoming involved in repetition. The attempt to re-create media art works under different (technological and historical) conditions always includes the danger of changing them to such a degree that they become unrecognizable in the end. In order to preserve a work one has to find an answer to the question: with which exhibition does a work start, when does it end? This question already takes into account that a work is a series, rather than unique, unrepeatable event. However, every decision made regarding the preservation of a work of art appears as a fixation of an (however fictional) identity or essence of this work, or, at least, a structuring mechanism at its core. Strikingly, the possibility of defining this essence or mechanism is exactly what is at stake when considering works like those by Peter Bogers', which do not acknowledge the presence of an unchangeable concept or original manifestation.

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Chapter 3: **Preserving installations**

Making decisions on what is key to a work is extremely difficult with works of art that could be categorized as "performative" in the most explicit sense. That is, works of art that are "designed for reproducibility" ["auf Reproduzierbarkeit angelegt[es]"], as one could say in reference to Benjamin's canonical essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction".15 Reproducibility can be understood here as the possibility of repetitive reproduction. These works, unlike traditional works of art that are handcrafted and almost impossible to copy, are destined to be reproduced from the very beginning. Copies are no longer imitations or secondary representations, but equally valuable instances of the same thing. If there are differences between copies this is not because they differ from an original. Instead, there is no original; they only differ from each other. Changes in appearance can no longer be measured against the unchangeable features of an original that never changes its basic features (which is actually an illusion that cannot even be sustained in the context of the preservation of traditional art objects like oil paintings). Hence, it is difficult to determine what is the first and last occurrence of a work that is always already a series.

This specifically applies to a lot of work that could be subsumed under the category of media art. Many multimedia installations, for instance, change their appearance over a number of years, as they are adapted for a specific spatio-temporal situation. Moreover, there are always changes in the technology used and the functioning of that technology. For people working in the field of documentation and preservation that automatically leads to the question when an installation is still the same work of art (already including the possibility of variation) and when it has become something completely different. Here, the aforementioned tension between the wish to record and document – the need to collect "essential" information in order to make the work transferable to a different situation – and the changeability of installations is rather evident. In some cases, as in the case of many of Peter Bogers' works, changeability is part of the concept, as the concept itself changes over time. As a consequence, multimedia installations ask for different approaches to documentation and preservation than traditional works of art. Not only their variability and site-specificity, but also aspects like interactivity and time-based-ness confront conservators and restorers with new questions.16 Like performances the nature of installations differs from traditional art objects. Works incorporating time-based media are understood in terms of their behaviours as much as their component parts. The works often anticipate an active involvement by the spectator (interactivity) and evoke a multi-sensorial experience (sound, vision, touch and smell). They are created for site- and time-specific occasions, and demonstrate specific vulnerabilities both in terms of the contexts and technologies on which they depend. In order to be able to display these works in the future it is important to understand what is important to preserve. And what is important to preserve goes beyond the object-based museal approach of the past.

In order to adequately present installation art both today and tomorrow conservators have to carefully document the specific requirements for the presentation – a task that is complicated by the fact that the "optimum" form of presentation is difficult to define precisely for many works of media art. One of the greatest challenges in the area of documentation of multimedia installations is the stipulation of rights and restrictions with regard to future presentations, finding a balance between the description of the actual presentation and requirements and a more abstract description usable for future presentations. In documentation and preservation one tries to capture the minimum and maximum requirements to describe the ideal installation space, lighting requirements, distribution of elements, concepts and objects involved. Projects like Inside Installation and the Variable Media Network are working on models for good practise and formulate guidelines for the preservation of installation art.17 To describe works that are variable in nature, the Variable Media Approach, initiated by Jon Ippolito, Associate Curator of Media Arts at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, has defined medium-independent "behaviours" instead of medium-specific qualities. The questionnaire developed in this context offers a framework to interview artists and museum staff, for instance, in the case of installations, about space, boundary, access, lighting, sound, security, base/s, distribution of elements, display equipment for inert elements, architectural placement and equipment visibility. Within this context, there are different behaviours under which works can be categorized. According to the Variable Media Paradigm the term "performed" can apply whenever the re-creators have to re-enact original instructions in a new context. Asking questions about the setting as well as documenting the initial event are key for the preservation of works that can be classified as "performed".18

There are two ways of understanding the notion of variability that is developed in this context: 1. as based on a distinction between the concept of the work of art and its appearance, and 2. as related to the assumption that the concept itself changes every time the work re-appears. Whereas the first approach remains committed to more traditional and definitely more philosophically idealist models of description (making a distinction between an idea and its representation), the second acknowledges the intertwinement of the concept and the medium-bound situation (which is a slightly more "materialist" stance).19 In the light of contemporary media theory, the first possibility to understand variability must appear quite problematic, as it seems to suggest that there is an "immaterial" concept before it is placed in a medium-bound context. However, this assumption ignores the fact that any concept, mechanism or behaviour identifiable in a work of art is only developed under specific conditions, that is, in relation to media that structure it as an event. Katherine Hayles has pointed out something quite similar when stating that the so-called information paradigm, which has been rather dominant in the field of media theory for a couple of years, often fails in acknowledging the inseparable entwining of information and matter.20 In other words: there is no software without hardware, no data without carrier, no behaviours without "body".21

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At the same time, taking the initial artistic and technological context as a definite frame of reference for any further evaluation must also appear problematic, since the work might still be recognizable as such when occurring in a different form, bound to a different medium. Even more so as it might be unavoidable to migrate or emulate the work of art in order to preserve it, that is, to make it accessible in the future.22 Once again we are confronted with the paradox involved in the preservation of media art: in order to preserve a work in its "authenticity", it has to change its form/mechanism/conceptual content (form and content can obviously not be separated here). And this is partly due to the fact that technological progress makes old technologies obsolete. If this is the core problem conservators of media art face today, it might be necessary to look for alternatives in defining what elements constitute a "work" or "performance" (describing it in terms of 'behaviours" is one answer to the problem). What types of repetition can be tolerated for the work to survive? Obviously, there is a hidden criterion of "family resemblance" that is applied to the specific situation. The only difficulty is that this criterion cannot be made explicit as a determining factor in the process of decision making, because, in the course of categorization, it must necessarily loose its force; strictly circumcised categories and intuitive patterns of likeness seem to exclude each other. In this regard, there always seems to be a certain contingency involved. Therefore, final decisions are often left to the artist, if still alive. On what grounds, then, could one make those necessary decisions considering the preservation of media art works?

The notion of performativity as tied to iteration, i.e. repetition that allows for differentiation or variability, regarding every performance as a performative event that is both temporal (or time-based) and processual, could lead to a possible solution. Every occurrence in this field presupposes a necessary singularity of the event, which has to be distinguished from an idea of an absolute uniqueness in the sense of an unrepeatable fact. So, what does this imply for preservation? It means that it is necessary to determine what type of event the work of art in its different "occurrences" is (rather than describing it in terms of its "appearances", a notion that remains committed to an idealist distinction between idea and representation), instead of searching for an originary concept or mechanism that holds the work together. There are a couple of questions that one could ask here: "In what respect could the work be called performative?" and, more importantly, "What does happen here?" Obviously, this is a strategy which does not apply for traditional art forms that are not explicitly time-based, processual and reproducible. It implies to have close look at the individual works and their specificities – it is a process that does not start from theory, but from practice, or practice-as-theory. The outcome of the process of decision making on how – in what way – to preserve a work, is therefore always undetermined in the beginning. In that respect, this method is not dogmatic.

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Chapter 4   **'Ritual'**

In terms of its re-presentation, the installation Ritual seems slightly more complicated than Sacrifice, which, even in its repetitive structure, as remained quite stable, whereas the former has changed significantly over time.23 This is exactly why Ritual is interesting to discuss in this context, constituting an excellent example for a work that is highly variable. There are at least two different variants of this installation: Ritual 1 and Ritual 2. Ritual 1 consists of a circle of twelve cubic monitors, showing rhythmic, repetitive T.V. images with a violent character. According to Bogers, the work started with a fascination about the amount of violence on television; he started to collect images of T.V. violence, without knowing yet in what way he could make use of them. For him, this activity was not so much related to a moral concern than to a more distanced interest in media-violence as a cultural phenomenon. That is, he was not really interested in images of actual violence one would encounter on the news, but in the type of fake violence one finds in movies and which is often staged by stuntmen. The result of this process of collecting is an installation, in which the viewer is surrounded by these images, standing inside a circle of monitors. The ticking of a clock, hanging on the wall, is synchronized with rhythm of the editing. Every second the violent action shifts from one monitor to the next, which makes the viewer turn around, following the rhythm of the clock. The violence they are confronted with mainly involved two or more people beating each other up, the knocks going like shockwaves through their bodies. In Ritual 2, the circle of twelve monitors is presented together with a couple of additional elements. It either includes a small monitor on a table or a big projection screen showing images recorded by surveillance cameras at other points elsewhere in the building. Additionally, there is a small monitor with headphones, showing rhythmic repetitions of violent actions (similar to those we see in Ritual 1)24, either with or without another monitor that goes on an off, showing instances of a random selection of different T.V. programmes. In the Stuttgart exhibition, Bogers decided to put three monitors on a table, together with all technical equipement and a surveillance camera (which was in earlier presentations recording a different space). The images of the background projection and/or monitors change according to the same time code as the images in the circle. If Ritual 1 and Ritual 2 are combined with each other, all the rhythms are synchronized to the ticking of the clock.

There are however alternative ways of installing this work. At the exhibition at the Netherlands Media Art Institute Ritual was presented in the form of a circle of twelve LCD screens and a small cubic monitor on the side with the flashing images from T.V. programmes, which was attached to the wall. Other elements of Ritual 2 were not part of the presentation. Instead of being placed on the ground, the flatscreens were suspended from the ceiling at eye level, which had quite different effect than the earlier realizations. The maybe most radical change – apart from the fact that almost all additional elements of Ritual 2 were not included – was the replacement of the cubic Sony monitors by LCD screens. For the artist, the decisions made in this context were based on the possibilities the specific situation offered; the solution found here seemed to be the most suitable for this particular exhibition space. Bogers tends to think of the work as the total series of presentations; there is no singled-out "original" – even the first occurrence is always just one presentation of many. Presenting the circle of monitors together with just one additional element from Ritual 2 does not seem so questionable, then, as it merely appears as an extended version of Ritual 1 or a reduced version of Ritual 2, depending on the perspective. In relation to Ritual, the radical changes made for this exhibition therefore seem quite legitimate.

Nonetheless, one could wonder whether the choice to present the work on LCD screens, for instance, did not compromise it too much. Is this radical modification still legitimate if one considers the event-structure of the work, the way it deals with the audience, its perceptual conditions? For Bogers, it almost seems, the experience of his installations is slightly more important than their specific appearance. This is of special importance, as the circle of monitors addresses the "spectator" in a confrontational way. It is rather clear why the word "spectator" has to be put in quotation marks here; the work employs strongly affective images and enhances their force by engaging in patterns of repetition that act on the spectator's body in a quite literal way. Moreover, it directs the audience through space by determining his movement, undermining the stable viewers' position. Beyond vision, there seems to be a sense of bodily affect involved that almost works as a sense of touch or violence. Again and again, the images enter the spectator's body both as undirected movement and directive force.

But wouldn't this imply a hidden criterion of "aesthetic authenticity", then? That is, a criterion based on an aesthetic experience that has to be preserved and/or recreated?25 Maybe, but this only counts for the images, the way the multiple repetitions function as events. With other words, the re-enactment of the performative process is exactly what determines the "live" quality of the work, which keeps the work "alive".26 This does not necessarily involve the preservation of the initial technological equipment, among which the monitors as they were presented first. For Bogers, preservation sometimes implies that the work is radically changed, as old technology can create a strong feeling of nostalgia that was foreign to the work at the time it occurred for first. However, as long as Bogers is concerned, this is not necessarily a bad thing (although he generally seems to prefer adaptation to contemporary technologies), but something that has to be taken into account, as it changes the work in a rather dramatic way. Considering the type of nostalgia old T.V. images can evoke – the sense of anachronism they confer – it might not even be such a strange idea to keep the old monitors when presenting the work once again. It would be a way of presenting the work in a historical context, something one could describe as a "museal" approach, which draws a picture of a specific period in time. Furthermore, Bogers has mentioned that the cubic monitor in some works functions as a sculptural element that cannot be dismissed. For that reason, in the Stuttgart exhibition the work was presented with the old cubic monitors. Nonetheless, with respect to the events taking place in the context of Ritual, related to an experience that is determined by an affective relation between image and body, this must appear problematic, because nostalgia would possibly create a distance that is not desirable and would maybe even destroy the work. In that sense, the technological frame must remain visible as "television", but invisible in terms of its historicity. In fact, the experience of T.V. images today is more and more bound to LCD screens, which increasingly enter people's homes. In that respect, choosing these screens for the presentation of Ritual is a legitimate if not logical choice, as the confrontation with television violence is key to this work. Otherwise, in the course of time it might not be identified as such anymore. Speaking in a radical manner, one might even consider replacing the images with newer ones, which are more up-to-date, and, therefore, less nostalgic. Last but not least, the decision to put the work on eye level actually increases the effect it has on the audience, which experiences the images more directly in this way, as they are closer.

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Chapter 5 **varying rates of variation**

In a way, it is maybe still up to the artist to decide in what respect, under which conditions, the installations can change their shape. For Bogers, it is very important to keep control over the situation as long as he is around. Simultaneously, he also acknowledges that in the future, after his death, his works might be changed and adapted for radically different settings, with new ways of presenting work and other technological possibilities. But even within a lifetime, there are differences between the works as to how much they change their form and in what situations. As Bogers has indicated, installations often vary frequently in what elements they include and how they are presented in the first years after they occur for the first time (which is actually not an absolute beginning, as the collecting of materials often starts long before concrete spatial presentations).27 These early years are an experimental period for the artist in which to try different configurations and settings. Later on, works gain a relative stability, as they are left as they are over longer periods of time and are less frequently exhibited; they basically undergo a process of sedimentation, in which certain elements become (temporarily) fixed and less interchangeable.

However, it is important to note that there is no such thing as an installation that remains invariable in every respect. There are definitely varying rates of variation in a work, but in the end it is still the possibility of repetitive change that prevails. Even in a situation, in which an installation is site-specific to such a degree that transferring it to a different site would destroy the work, it would still change its form/mechanism/conceptual content over a course of time. That is, when encountered it would be considered as a different type of event. This has especially become evident in relation with Ritual regarding the consequences of technological nostalgia. Even if a work, like Sacrifice, is sold as a unicum and does not seem to undergo significant changes anymore, its development is not put to a definite hold. Changes in lighting, for instance, can emphasize different aspects of the installation. In the case of Sacrifice this can lead to changes in the way the work is perceived und understood. Whereas at the Netherlands Media Art Institute, the photographic document, which had the form of a scroll, was attached to a white wall, in a space with relatively neutral lighting, the presentation at the Württembergischer Kunstverein

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Chapter 6 **The Unified Field**

But what about works, then, which have not been repeated many times and have not yet changed in a memorable way? How can these works be conceptualized as possible future events? Bogers' video and sound installation The Unified Field, one of Peter Bogers' most recent works, seems to offer a good opportunity to consider this situation, shedding light on more than one aspect of what one could define as "performativity". In The Unified Field three large video projections are combined with sound comes from ten small speakers that are suspended from the ceiling and spread through the space. They hang in equidistance to each other such that they form an imaginary grid. The audible sound is that of multiple voices, singing or chanting in a choir-like manner, pausing and resuming their activity at exactly the same instance. They are synchronized according to a rigid audio-pattern. The images projected on the wall are black-and-white and slightly blurry, exposing the image of a grid, as a "visual result of what affiliates all sounds: the rhythmicity in the alternation of collective and simultaneous in- and exhalation." According to the artist, the figure of the grid exemplifies the idea of a unified field, "a term used in transcendent meditation, which refers to the possibility that synchronized positive human thoughts could be capable of influencing everyday reality. The number of participators and the power of thought determine the level of influence."28 From behind the projected grid, an abstracted "talking head" elaborates on the functions of the human brain and the way synchronizing our thoughts could solve problems on a bigger scale.

Apart from the idea of unification, a perceivable difference between the voices, coming from various cultural backgrounds and language communities, is key to this work. In today's media reality, we are continuously confronted with all kinds of information, that is, data, sound patters, images, which are similar and yet different in significant ways. Media formats look much like each other around world, but still appear as foreign if they do not come from contexts we are familiar with. The viewer of satellite television, for instance, constantly finds himself in an area of conflict between recognizability and unrecognizabiliy (which is basically the situation the artist found himself in when getting a satellite dish at home). As Bogers has indicated, an important element of his more recent works is the idea that especially sound can make this strange union of synchronization and difference more tangible, as it were. In The Unified Field, the ambivalence mentioned above translates itself into the way the audience moves through the exhibition space, choreographed by the emerging sound patterns. From close-by, every single voice that comes from one of the speakers has its own, distinct quality. From a distance, all the voices together form a unified, carefully conducted choir. This constant movement constitutes an "event" which is based on the very possibility of both closeness and distance. The experience of a multiplicity that, from far, appears like unified whole, but from nearby disclosed itself as a pattern of difference (and vice versa), is what lies at the bottom of this work.29

One could understand this quite literally: that the literal movement of listening to the individual speakers and taking a step back as well as wandering around is rather fundamental. It is in that respect that The Unified Field becomes a performative installation, in which audience participation plays a central role. This implies that, whenever the work is reinstalled, the possibility of this movement, as trajectory or choreography, has to be guaranteed. More than with other works by Peter Bogers, the particular spatial parameters of an exhibition site become determining for the failure or success of future re-installations. In this context, the grid-like structure of the speakers is quite crucial (both conceptually and in its visual impact), as well the distances between the speakers and between speakers and images. But apart from the spatial configuration that the site allows for, thinking of re-realization as a form of preservation also includes to be aware of the specific sound conditions. If a space absorbs too much sound or has an overwhelming echo, this could alter the experience of the work in a significant way (which might not necessarily be a problem, but something that has to be considered).

Another aspect that has to be taken into account is the fact that the voices are not dematerialized, but bound to a specific medium, to specific bodily circumstances that also involve the body of the audience. Both the visibility of a framing medium as well as the bodily responsiveness of the audience are of quite some importance for the work to function in the way it does. The voices are not dematerialized, divine, ideal pieces of information, but related to specific conditions created by the global media. That is, however immaterial they appear, the possibility of transmitting and receiving is dependent on the possibility of transmitting and receiving bodies – whether or not these are human or technological. In that respect, materiality and mediality have to remain visible conditions of the work. The question therefore is, whether in a scenario, in which the speakers could be replaced by hidden sound sources (using directed sound devices, for instance), these conditions would be disguised. At the other hand, if the invisibility of the medium is a condition of media reality today, this would likewise be a fact that would ask for attention, and even more so, for specific technological solutions in the context of the exhibition. In order not to destroy the self-reflexive medium-relatedness of the work, this invisibility would have to be made visible as invisibility. With other words: the near-to invisible or hidden character of information transmitters would have to be exposed as being a condition of what we perceive.

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Chapter 7 **Conclusions**

In contrast with Sacrifice and Ritual, The Unified Field was presented in an almost identical manner in both exhibitions. Although the exhibition space itself had a different size, which slightly influenced the distance between the speakers, for instance, one can still say that the work consistently appeared as the same work, with no room for any doubt about this fact. Which is to say that The Unified Field was not that variable yet, and it almost seemed as if its performativity was not so much based on the possibility and necessity of variation, but on other characteristics, as for example on the way the work stimulates the bodily movement of "spectator", who actually becomes a "performer" within the setting of the installation. This is actually the way the "performativity" of installations is generally described, as they seem to ask for participation in a similar way as many of the performances realized in the 1970's, blurring the boundaries between active performance and passive spectatorship.

Simultaneously, the fact that the work thematically addresses the idea of non-identical repetition, i.e. the intertwinement of sameness and difference across cultural contexts, makes that the idea of iterability remains present as a kind of conceptual "background noise". Even more so, as the trajectory of the audience is literally determined by the repetitive patterns of differentiation and unification the work lays bare. In itself, The Unified Field is already an open system or "infinite totality", and as such it can be experienced. In this way, The Unified Field remains committed to a notion of performativity that is based on the possibility of repetition, while, at the same time, it translates this notion to the level of concrete experience. In that respect, one could say that it is exactly in multimedia installations like these that iteration becomes evident as a characteristic of the work, becoming manifest as immanent repetition and transcendent variability.

Hence, the performativity of this type of installations can be described in a two-fold manner: 1. by the performativity of their experience, as they are processual and time-based, facilitating audience participation and laying out choreographies as well as trajectories, and 2. by the fact that they are iterable beyond their initial occurrence, as they can be repeated in the future. Any attempt to confine the work to a certain state must always reach a limit. The performativity of installations challenges preservation in quite fundamental way – not only due to the idea that they are tied to something as unstable and intangible as "experience", but also considering the fact that variability is often part of what they are. What conservators ought to preserve is the very possibility of variation. That is, preservation, aiming at the possibility of re-presentation, should facilitate variation, understood as changeability, without loosing a sense of what type of event the work actually is. And to analyse the event, it is necessary to have special attention for the way the work functions, what actually happens in the situations it occurs. In this way, analysing an installation in the context of preservation does not imply a fixation of an unchangeable concept, meaning or essence, but an understanding of its dynamics. It means to unravel its history from the perspective of temporal change rather than a-temporal stability.

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Notes

1. In the context of multimedia installations, for instance, physical challenges are posed by the transience of technologies. Factory-made products as information carriers and playback equipment are subject to the competitive situation of the market. New technologies succeed each other at a high speed, and the production of older "formats" and playback equipment is often discontinued.

2. The notion of "media art" has frequently been criticized, as it is quite broad as a category and, at the same time, seems to implicitly affirm the classical division between temporal arts (theatre) and classical, a-temporal art forms (painting). Moreover, it is questionable whether the term "media art" is still applicable in the "age of the post-medium condition" (a notion coined by Rosalind Krauss in 1999). However, this term will be used in this article to describe art that is time-based, mass-media-related and intrinsically reproducible without claiming "traditional" art forms to be necessarily a-temporal, static and removed from the realm of the popular media. The possible inaccuracy of the terminology is taken for granted, as it is considered a chance to re-evaluate contemporary art forms under changed conditions. Last but not least, it acknowledges that every work of art is medium-bound in the broadest sense of the word, without denying the possibility of one single work including different media and materials.

3. In other works like Ritual (1997) and Exotic Exercise (2006), he actually uses found-footage from television, recycled images of other people's bodies.

4.Installations are often classified as "performative" because they are supposed to be unique in the sense of an unrepeatable and fundamentally unrepresentable event, a view that is derived from a certain understanding of what a "performance" ought to be. From this specific perspective, this absolute uniqueness and unrepeatability of what happens is one of the most important features of an artistic event that could be qualified as a "performance". See e.g. Phelan, Peggy. Unmarked: The Politics of Performance. London etc.: Routledge, 1993, and Fischer-Lichte, Erika. Ästhetik des Performativen. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2004.

5. See e.g. Phelan 1993: 146 ff. and, in other respects, see also Reason, Matthew. "Archive or Memory? The Detritus of Live Performance." New Theatre Quaterly, vol.19, no. 1 (February 2003): 82-89.

6. See Jones, Amelia. "'Presence' in Absentia: Experienceing Performance as Documentation." Art Journal, vol. 56, no. 4 (1997): 16. Quoted in: Auslander, Philip. "The Performativity of Performance Documentation." PAJ, vol. 84 (2006): 1-10.

7. Auslander 2006: 2

8. In his book How to Do Things with Words (1962), in which he develops his well-known speech-act theory, Austin describes the phenomenon of performative utterances that actually constitute what they state. (The notorious example is a sentence used in marriage ceremonies: "I take this man as my lawfully wedded husband.") ; Austin, J.L. How to Do Things with Words. 2nd edition. Oxford: Clarendon, (1962) 1975.

9. Auslander 2006: 5.

10. Cf. Phelan 1993: 146.

11. Derrida, Jacques. "Signature Event Context." (1972) In: Ibidem. Limited Inc. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1988: 1-24.

12. See also Dressler, Iris. "Intimate video." In: Peter Bogers: Shared Moments. [exh.cat.] Pittburgh: Wood Street Galleries, 2002: 8-25.

13. There even is a different version of this photograph that reveals even more, including a monitor next to the bathtub, showing the image of the mouth, which can normally be seen inside the glass case. According to the artist, the monitor was included in the performance setting because it provided him with the possibility to check on the image during the process of recording. The photograph was always meant to be part of the installation.

14. Something similar applies to works like Portret and Fingers (1992), in which the image has to remain recognizable as the product of electrons being shot through a cathode ray tube, which lays bare inside the glass case. In this context, one could possibly say that in this way the image is revealed to be a process, the movements on the screen corresponding to the movement of electrons that hit its surface. Exposing technology is a central strategy of these works.

15. Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." (1935/36) in: Idem. Illuminations. Edited and with an introduction by Hannah Arendt. London: Pimlico, 1999: 211-244 (218). For the German version, see Benjamin, Walter. "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner Reproduzierbarkeit." (1935/36) In: Idem. Illuminationen. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1961: 148-184 (156).

16. A fitting description of this situation can be found in de 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 flexible view of what may or may not be changed about a work, challenging conventional notions of accuracy and authenticity."; Real, William A. "Toward Guidelines for Practice in Preservation and Documentation of Technology-Based Installation Art." Journal of the American Institute for Conservation, vol. 40 (Fall/Winter 2001), no. 3: 226.

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17. In the Netherlands, the decision making model developed by the Foundation for the Preservation of Modern Art (Stichting Behoud Moderne kunst) is often used as a guideline. In this context, information on the significance of the technology used, the manner of presentation and the intentions of the artist is considered crucial to the preservation of media art. However, the development of methodology and instruments for the acquisition, documentation and distribution of such information is still at a relatively early stage. To gain more insight into problems surrounding the presentation and documentation of multimedia installations, the Netherlands Media Art Institute has initiated research and case studies on the international state of affairs and participates in international research projects like the EU-funded Inside Installations, on which a number of prestigious European art institutions collaborate. The objectives of the studies included finding an answer to the following more general questions: What aspects play a role in the preservation and re-installation of multimedia installations? What are the criteria for preservation and re-installation? What aesthetic and technical elements are essential, and should be preserved in order to ensure that the integrity and significance of the work remain intact during future presentations? How can installations be registered and documented? What technical know-how is required to ensure the possibility of future presentations of these installations?

18. For other possible behaviours, see e.g. Depocas, Alain, Ippolito, Jon and Jones, Caitlin, eds. Permanence Through Change: The Variable Media Approach. New York: Salomon R. Guggenheim Museum and Montreal: Daniel Langlois Foundation, 2003. See also http://variablemedia.net.

19. The term "medium-bound" is supposed to indicate that the work is not necessarily "medium-specific" in the sense of something that can only be understood in relation with a specific medium that is explored in and by it, but rather implies that the work is always bound to a situation that is co-determined by particular media without being confined to it. That is, every work is dependent on media and can never be experienced or thought of as independent from any medium even in the age of the "post-medium condition".

20. Halyes, Katherine. How We Became Post-Human: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics. Chicago etc.: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

21. Consequently, one of the main questions in preserving media art is whether it is possible to separate the content from the soft- and hardware. Even on a pratical level, it often seems that content and context are inseparable.

22. "Migration" is the upgrading of equipment and source material, whereas the term "emulation" is the imitation of the original look of a piece by totally different means. For more information see "strategies" on http://variablemedia.net.

23. Here one can see the difference between the works that have to be understood in terms of a series and works that are more confined to a relatively stable situation.

24. This part is frequently referred to as Video Violence, a work that can also be shown on its own.

25. Cf. Ex, Nicole. Zo goed als oud: De achterkant van het restaureren. Amsterdam: Amber, 1993: 103 and passim.

26. In an interview conducted in the context of preservation research, Bogers indicates that a work never dies, even when preserved in a specific form without developing further, since the experience one can have when watching it is what keeps the work alive.

27. Nevertheless, the year of the first presentation is often the date accepted for the work's initial production. This fixation, however, has to remain necessarily problematic as an Archimedean point of reference for future presentations.

28. For the artist's statement, see http://www.kunstoplocatie.nl/Peter_Boogers.htm [translation: JS].

29. However, Peter Bogers does not seem to problematize the idea of unification, for him, it seems to constitute the chance of communication beyond difference. So, the incorporation of difference frequently citicized by critical thinkers around the globe (reflected by the notion of unimedia) does not appear as a problem to Bogers, as it seems.