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On the lives and futures of contemporary art at the museum

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Contemporary art challenges the traditional idea of a musealium as well as institutional procedures related to collection care and preservation. Conventionally, visual artworks have been perceived as fixed, unique, material entities created and finished at a particular time, and museum approaches to collecting and preserving them were established accordingly. Nevertheless, contemporary art often resists this definition and undermines dogmas of material authenticity and artist's intent, as well as the conviction that an object's integrity resides in its physical features. Taking as its focus the triangle of relationships between an artist, a museum and a contemporary artwork as collectible, this study investigates how contemporary artworks by Mirosław Bałka, Danh Vo and Barbara Kruger are collected, documented and conserved in today's institutions. It looks at how (and whether) new methods developed in the field of contemporary art conservation, such as the artist's interview, are adopted by museums, and attempts to identify factors undermining their effectiveness. By looking at contemporary art as a new paradigm of artistic practice and building on notions such as musealisation, art project as art form and art object as document, this study works towards a theoretical model that address the incompatibility between a traditional museum approach to collecting and preserving and the features of contemporary art. By employing and extending concepts introduced by conservation theorist Hanna Hölling and the notion of 'anarchives' by media theorist Siegfried Zielinski, this study adopts the model of the 'artwork-as-(an)archive'. Starting from the premise that our future understanding of contemporary artworks can only be constructed through traces of documentation, this model grants documents a status equal to that of art objects and obliges institutions to care for them on a similar basis. Besides its capacity to facilitate conservation, the artwork-as-(an)archive model is here considered as a space for collaboration between artists and museums, a space to be collectively shaped, filled and nourished that fosters transparency and inclusiveness.

Collecting Archives of Objects and Stories

Collecting Archives of Objects and Stories:
On the lives and futures of contemporary art at the museum

Agnieszka B. Wielocha

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Photographer: A. B. Wielocha

Collecting Archives of Objects and Stories: On the lives and futures of contemporary art at the museum

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I express my deep thanks to the NACCA cohort, to Dušan Barok for the often heated discussions and for teaching me to look at many things in a different way, to Claudia Röck for challenging my ideas and for all the biking, skiing, climbing and 'wandlopening' we did together, to Marta García Celma for her cheerfulness and friendship, to Brian Castriota for sharing with me the many secrets of TBM conservation, to Maria Theodoraki for being radical, to Nina Quabeck for supporting my initiatives and taking part in them, to Caitlin Spangler-Bickell for intellectual stimulation, to Artemis Rüstau for warmth and trust, to Iona Goldie Scot for being my secondment buddy, to Joanna Kiliszek for sharing amazing stories from the past, to Panda de Haan for insights into Dutch culture, to Zoë Miller for calm and professionalism and to Tomas Markievicius for being my sparring partner in shaping some difficult definitions. I am so lucky to have you with me during this journey.

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This research owes a great intellectual debt to my colleagues from the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, where I first learned how powerful contemporary art might be and where I first started to think critically about my responsibilities as a conservator. Special thanks go to Sebastian Cichocki, Katia Szczeka, Meagan Down, Magda Lipska, Kasia Karwanska, Tomek Fudala, Marta Dziewańska and Joanna Mytkowska. Thank you for doing what you are doing. I wish I had understood the importance of this earlier in my career.

Introduction

Process Art: Objects and documents

In 2014, just weeks before the opening of a large exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, where I worked as conservator, a new artwork was donated to the museum. It was to be included in the upcoming exhibition, but first required conservation treatment.[1] The piece turned out to be a three-dimensional model of a head, made in unfired ceramic clay. The sculpture seemed to be a work-in-progress, still exhibiting the traditional armature made up of pieces of clay and wooden crosses tied together with metal wires. Likewise, the back had been left unfinished, as if the creative process had come to a halt. The core of the work was made of a random assortment of materials – aluminium, wood, an old printed circuit board with some electronic components – lashed together with plastic tape (Figure 1-2). The overall material condition of the sculpture was poor: the surface was covered with mould, the metal wires corroded, and various pieces of clay had come detached from the structure. As the objective of the planned conservation treatment was to 'make the sculpture presentable for exhibition', and time was running out, I started the preparations by collecting information about the artwork's history and meaning.

The sculpture turned out to be the result of a collaboration between Paweł Althamer and Artur Żmijewski, two internationally acclaimed Polish artists, known for their participatory art projects relinquishing traditional criteria of authorship to create temporary creative communities. The sculpture was created during the project 'Tribute to Academy', a workshop that the two had organised at a gallery space of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, the school from which they had graduated and

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1   A more detailed account of this story has been published in Wielocha, A. 2016. Between
        Curator and the Artist: a Problem of Authority. In E. Hermens & F. Robertson (Eds.),
        Authenticity in Transition: Changing Practices in Art Making and Conservation (pp. 54–61).
        London: Archetype Publications.
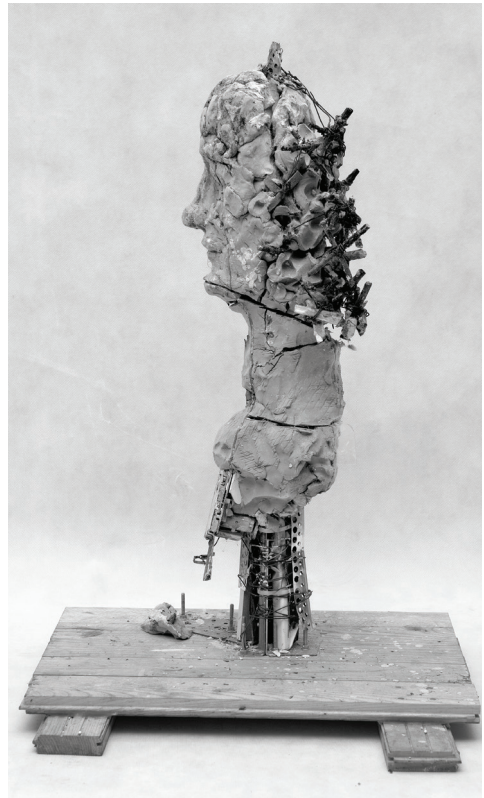
Figure 1-2. Artur Żmijewski, Paweł Althamer *The Visit of Professor Zemła*, general view.
Photographer: César Delgado Martín. Courtesy Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw.

where the tradition of craftsmanship is still an important aspect of the teaching process.[2] Althamer and Żmijewski invited professors, students and alumni to work together on one piece – a drawing, a painting or a sculpture. The everyday hierarchy of the academic institution was suspended for the duration of the project, as all participants were invited to immerse themselves in a common artistic adventure, after agreeing that all artworks created in the studio could be changed by others. The video documenting the event shows

Figure 3. Artur Żmijewski, Paweł Althamer and Gustaw Zemła working together during workshop *Tribute to Academy*. Photographer: unknown. Courtesy Galeria Salon Akademii.

that the sculpture later donated to the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw was a joint collaboration between various artists and their former professor, Gustaw Zemła, and thus a confrontation between radical, experimenting artists and their former teacher – a traditional sculptor and a proponent of the conventional approach to fine arts education (Figure 3). When comparing the stills from the video documenting the last moments of joint sculpting with the work's current form, I was able to see that the process of working on the sculpture had continued even after the official event was over.

I am a traditionally trained conservator and the principles guiding my work have always been bound to the assumption that the integrity of an artwork is linked both to 'artist's intent' and to the original or authentic appearance of the work.[3] But who was the artist in this case? And was there any original, completed version of the work to which I could have related as a conservator? The authors had created the

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2   For more information about the event, see: *Cześć Akademii. Absolwenci* (*Artur Żmijewski, Paweł Althamer*)*, Profesorowie i Studenci ASP w Warszawie.* (May 15, 2013). Obieg.pl. Retrieved from http://archiwum-obieg.u-jazdowski.pl/print/28681.

3   I received training in conservation and restoration of paintings and wooden polychromed sculptures from the Faculty of Conservation and Restoration of Works of Art, Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts in Poland, where conservation was taught in line with Italian tradition inspired by writings of Cesare Brandi (e.g.: Brandi, 2005) and aestheticism with the emphasis on technical and analytical skills.

Figure 4. Sculpture conservator Paulina Gajos treating *The Visit of Professor Zemła*.
Photographer: A. B. Wielocha.

artwork alongside other participants in the artistic action, and even after this action
was over there had been subsequent interventions by other individuals. Furthermore,
in a personal conversation, Artur Żmijewski made clear that for him, it was the
process of creating the sculpture, and the interaction between the participants
in the action and their former teacher, that constituted the 'real' work of art.[4]
There was no intention to make the resulting physical object last, nor was there
a predetermined artistic concept for any material outcome. The sculpture itself was
a witness to the process and a document of the activity, and, therefore, had no original
appearance.

Several possible scenarios were explored: was it better to abstain from any intervention
on the part of conservators and show the sculpture in its current state, or, rather, to
complete the sculpting process by making a plaster cast, as suggested by artists? On the
one hand, taking into account the unstable microclimate in the exhibition space, there
was a major risk that the high humidity could cause recurrence of the mould, which
could in turn spread to other works in the show. Unfired clay is not a stable material

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4   Żmijewski, A. (November 27, 2014). [Email to Agnieszka Wielocha]. The personal archive of
     the author.

and lack of intervention could have caused further shrinkage and loss. On the other hand, finishing the sculpture would have been highly dubious from an ethical perspective, and – if at all an option – would have required the artists' involvement – a condition difficult to fulfil within the available time-frame. The eventual decision to opt for a third solution, consisting of the consolidation, cleaning and reattachment of loose parts of the work, was taken in collaboration with the curator of the show. The guiding aesthetic principle for the treatment of the work was to avoid making the sculpture look 'too neat and clean' and to preserve some of the roughness of the in-progress clay *bozzetto* (Figure 4). The curator decided to exhibit the piece on a rotating wooden stand similar to the one used in the original process of sculpting it (Figure 5-6). On display, the artwork consisted not only of the sculpture, but also of the video illustrating how it was created. After the show, the artwork was accessioned into the museum collection under the title *The Visit of Professor Zemła*.[5] However, the museum purchased only the sculpture, while the video explaining the artwork and contextualising the artefact, on loan for the duration of the exhibition, was returned to its owner and not included in the museum's holdings.[6]

Figure 5. Artur Żmijewski, Paweł Althamer *The Visit of Professor Zemła.* Installation view of the exhibition *In the Near Future, The Collection of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw*, Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw. Photographer: Bartosz Stawiarski. Courtesy Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw.

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5   See: Artur Żmijewski, Paweł Althamer - *The Visit of Prof. Zemła* - Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw. Retrieved from https://artmuseum.pl/en/kolekcja/praca/althamer-pawel-zmijewski-artur-odwiedziny-profesora-zemly.

6   The video was created by cinematographer, director and screenwriter of documentary films Rafał Żurek and produced by the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw . See: Żurek, R. (Cinematographer). (2013). 'Cześć Akademii' [unpublished]. Poland: Salon Akademii/ Akademia Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie. Copyrights: Artur Żmijewski, Paweł Althamer. Whereas in the opening credits of the film Żmijewski and Althamer are listed as 'the authors', the video is a separate, independent work. Interestingly, on the website of the International Film Festival Rotterdam it is featured under its English title as a short film by Żmijewski, distributed by Galerie Peter Kilchmann. See: https://iffr.com/en/2018/films/glory-to-the-academy.

Figure 6. Artur Żmijewski, Paweł Althamer *The Visit of Professor Zemła*. Installation view of the exhibition *In the Near Future, The Collection of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw*, Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw. Photographer: Karol Kaczorowski. Courtesy Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw.

My experience with this clay sculpture taught me that conventional principles of fine art conservation, oriented towards the preservation and restoration of physical material, are not always applicable to contemporary art.[7] The authorship of the artwork might not overlap with the authorship of the physical object, and the same principle may apply to the ownership of both. What is presented to the public might be, to a certain extent, a product of the institution that collected the artwork, with or without the artist's participation. And, finally, what conservators conserve might be just a piece of process documentation converted into a work of art through its musealisation. The treatment that the sculpture underwent on the premises of the Museum of Modern Art allowed for the stabilisation and significant prolongation of the life of the object, but it did not secure the preservation of the artwork as such. The sculpture itself does not fully convey the intent of the artists. In order to do so, it would need to be contextualised, for example by the video capturing the process behind its creation. And yet, although the video says more about the artwork than the material object (the sculpture itself), it was classified as a mere 'document' and not acquired together with the sculpture. All these issues trigger questions related to the role of the museum as a keeper of art: what does it mean to collect and preserve a contemporary work of art? What constitutes a contemporary work of art? Who has the authority over its 'true'

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7   What is here referred to as 'conventional principles of fine art conservation' overlaps with what others have called 'traditional conservation practice' (Laurenson, 2004) or 'classical conservation' (Muñoz-Viñas, 2005). A detailed summary of the development of the conservation field and the analysis of these two notions has been provided by van Saaze (2013, pp. 37–47).

shape and how to safeguard its identity for future generations? These are in many respects still under-researched questions – the very ones that have motivated me to undertake this study.[8]

Questions and Challenges

Contemporary art presents a challenge to traditional principles of conservation as a discipline. Similarly, it poses new problems for the preservation of artworks, considered one of the principal duties of the museum as a collecting institution. The issue is not new: the conservation of contemporary art began to emerge as a specialised field already in the 1980s, in response to growing difficulties with conserving the modern materials and new technologies increasingly embraced by artists.[9] The rapid advance of the both practice-oriented and academic field of conservation, fostered by the acceleration of changes in art practices towards the end of the 20th century, has led to the development of various solutions designed to meet these challenges. As a result, new theoretical frameworks, models, tools and approaches have been formulated. However, while most of them take conservation practice as their starting point, few are in fact compatible with the museum 'ecosystem', and are, therefore, seldom implemented in collecting institutions. This gap between the fast-developing theory of contemporary art conservation and what can be described as the rigidness of institutional practice has yet to receive sufficient attention among researchers, and today, after more than two decades of discussions, enough time has elapsed to finally examine these issues in depth.

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8   Among the established scholars associated with the field of conservation who have begun to tackle these issues are Erma Hermens, Vivian van Saaze, Hanna Hölling, Glenn Wharton, Iwona Szmelter, Sanneke Stigter, Pip Laurneson, Gunnar Heydenreich, Annet Dekker and Julia Noordegraaf. A comprehensive literature review as well as the history and development of the field are provided in Section 3 of this Chapter.

9   The first international conferences on the subject were organised in Canada (International Symposium on the Conservation of Contemporary Art, Ottawa 1980) and Australia (Conservation and Contemporary Art, Sydney 1984). For more details on the former, see: Domergue, D. M. (1980, September). 'The International Symposium on the Conservation of Contemporary Art'. WAAC (Western Association for Art Conservation) Newsletter, 2, 3. Retrieved from https://cool.conservation-us.org/waac/wn/wn02/wn02-3/wn02-303.html. For the latter see: Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material. (1984: Sydney) (1984). 'Conservation and contemporary art: abstracts [of papers]'. ICCM, [Sydney].

In this regard, the vantage point of this dissertation is the triangle of mutual relationships between an artist, a museum, and a contemporary artwork collected by the museum, investigating the condition of contemporary artworks in the museum environment – how they are collected, documented, cared for and conserved in today's institutions. By examining the artist interview, one of the tools developed in the field of contemporary art conservation and its use in institutions that collect contemporary art, this study looks at how (and if) new methods are incorporated in the museum setting, and attempts to identify the factors that might undermine their potential and effectiveness. At the same time, this dissertation introduces more profound questions about the nature of contemporary artworks in relation to traditional museum structures, and traces the discrepancies between these two notions, while working towards a theoretical model that might help to bridge them. The ultimate goal of this study is to reflect critically on conservation praxis in museums that collect contemporary art and point towards potential improvements that allows for a better care and perpetuation of contemporary art.

As the example of *The Visit of Professor Zemła* shows, safeguarding the physical representation of the artwork does not guarantee its future conceptual integrity or legibility, which is contingent on information that contextualises the artefact. This study follows the premise that a contemporary work of art, rather than being a 'thing in itself', is best understood through a dialogue with the social sphere, and in consequence it needs to be collected and cared for as such. By mapping relations between contemporary artworks and the context of their creation, dissemination and musealisation, it explores this multifaceted interplay and argues that conservation cannot be accomplished without collecting the stories which narrate this complexity. I will argue that the gap between current institutional practice and the theoretical approaches developed in contemporary art conservation can be bridged only if museums adapt to the needs of contemporary art beyond the area of conservation. In other words, in order to effectively secure the continuation of contemporary artworks, the entire museum must adjust to the needs of this 'new' kind of art and engage actively in ensuring its perpetuation. I propose that this goal can be achieved by expanding the traditional notion of the collectible or the 'musealium' to include documentation as an

integral, constituent part, since documentation carries a major share of the identity of contemporary artworks, and allows for an understanding of the diverse ways they can be read, perceived and interpreted.[10]

This dissertation sets out from the premise that the structure of today's museums and the notion of conservation that they employ do not fully match up with the needs of contemporary art, and thus aims to offer a solution that respects the central position of the collection as the foundation of the museum. This intention is followed by research on collaborations between museums and artists, with a special focus on the uses of the artist interview – a relatively new research tool in the field of contemporary art conservation. The definition of the artist interview and the conceptualization of the artwork's documentation, both grounded in museum collection-related practices, constitute the key notions examined in this study. Instituting the two 'model' concepts – the artist interview and documentation – raises questions concerning the relationship between them. What are the functions and uses of the artist interview within the body of documentation of an institutionally collected contemporary artwork? This query guides the empirical portion of the study, which consists of the analysis of numerous case studies examining day-to-day practices in museums that collect contemporary art.

Foundations and Contexts

Specialisation in contemporary art conservation emerged in response to challenges posed by artists' growing use of unconventional materials and new technologies throughout the 20th century. Although technical materials-oriented research is still an important part of the knowledge produced within the field, since the beginning of the 21st century, the focus has shifted towards concepts, meanings and processes, i.e. the immaterial features of contemporary artworks (Beerkens, 2016). Conventionally,

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10   In this dissertation the notion of an 'artwork's identity' is employed according of the definition established by Marta Garcia Celma and Brian Castriota for the revised *Decision-Making Model for Contemporary Art Conservation and Presentation*, according to which "the identity of a work of art is a term employed in the conservation of contemporary to refer to a work's unique character and self-sameness. It is closely connected to the notion of significant properties, understood as the features or properties regarded as constitutive of that identity" (Giebeler, Sartorius, & Heydenreich, 2019, p. 24).

visual artworks have been perceived as fixed, unique, material entities that were created and finished at a particular moment in time, and traditional conservation theories were established according to these principles.[11] Nevertheless, art produced during the last century has often resisted these tenets, and therefore undermines dogmas of conservation such as material authenticity, artist intent, reversibility, minimal intervention, and the conviction that the integrity of the object of conservation lies in its physical features, and therefore should be approached with the help of so-called 'hard science'. This discrepancy and its practical impact on decision making has pushed scholars and practitioners working in the field to seek out theories, concepts and tools that support an effective approach to this 'new' kind of art and secure its continuation.

This dissertation builds on traditions in contemporary art conservation as a field of practice and study, and its achievements to date. The discipline was established primarily by conservation professionals working in or collaborating with museums and heritage organisations, but increasingly also involves academics and universities, who have now come to make up an important segment of the research community. The conservation dilemmas that arise from dealing with variable, changeable and process-based artworks have been addressed in numerous conferences, symposia, research projects and their resulting publications. The key event for my generation of conservators involved with 20th- and 21st-century art was the international symposium *Modern Art: Who Cares?* (*MA:WC?*, Amsterdam, 8-10 September 1997) and the resulting publication launched in 1999 and reprinted in 2005, which not only established the direction in which the field was to develop over subsequent decades, but also instituted an international community of professionals.[12] A direct result of the symposium was the formation of the International Network for the Conservation of Contemporary Art (INCCA), an organisation put in place to coordinate the collection and exchange of information on

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11   The distinction between traditional (classical) and contemporary conservation theories was addressed, among others, by Salvador Muñoz-Viñas in his prominent book Contemporary Theory of Conservation. See: Muñoz-Viñas, S. (2005). *Contemporary Theory of Conservation*. Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann.

12   See: Hummelen, Y., & Sillé, D. (Eds.). (2005). Modern Art: Who Cares? An interdisciplinary research project and an international symposium on the conservation of modern and contemporary art. London: Archetype Publications. The event was the culmination of a Dutch research project Conserveren Moderne Kunst / Conservation of Modern Art (1995-97).

modern artists and their work.[13] The event brought together professionals and scholars from inside and outside the conservation community: museum directors, curators, registrars, art historians and philosophers, establishing interdisciplinarity as a way of working and as a backbone for future discussions (Marontate, 1997). The publication introduced one of the first tools designed to help caretakers assess the condition of and design treatments for unconventional artworks: *The Decision-Making Model for the Conservation of Modern and Contemporary Art* (1997), developed by the Dutch Foundation for the Conservation of Contemporary Art (SBMK). Notably, the model equates the actual physical condition of the art object with the impact of the artwork's meaning on conservation-related decisions. Moreover, the symposium MA:WC? set the stage for early discussions around the inclusion of the artist in conservation decision-making through the use of artist interviews.[14]

Following the example of *MA:WC?* the field of contemporary art conservation has continued to develop through research projects and symposia that, by engaging both scholars and professionals, have provided space to link together theory and practice through collaboration between universities, research institutes, professional organisations and museums. Another pivotal project touching upon issues discussed in this book was a three-year large-scale European research undertaking focused on the preservation and presentation of installation art, called *Inside Installations: Preservation and Presentation of Installation Art* followed by a concluding symposium,

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13   For more information about INCCA see: www.incca.org. The network is discussed in Introduction, p. 16.

14   One of the conclusions from the project stemming the conference, as Dionne Sillé, manager of the project at the Foundation for the Conservation of Modern Art (Stichting Behoud Moderne Kunst; called often by its Dutch abbreviation: SBMK) stated in the introduction to the *MA:WC?* publication: "Interviews with artists are a key instrument in preventing conservation mistakes. The project showed that consulting the makers of an object produced valuable information. A separate study will therefore be devoted to this subject" (Hummelen & Sillé, 2005, p. 18). For more about the history of the artist interview for conservation purposes see: Chapter 1, p. 42.

Contemporary Art: Who Cares? (2010) and a publication (Scholte & Wharton, 2011).[15] The key aspects of this project revolved around artist participation and documentation techniques and strategies, both of which are key to the arguments I will be presenting here.[16] Through the inclusion of curators and museologists, the symposium opened up the field even further, specifically addressing the role of institutions in collecting, keeping and caring for contemporary artworks.[17]

The profound reconsideration of the traditional paradigms of conservation, and their application in caring for contemporary artworks, was highly influenced by discourses from the sub-field of media (or time-based media) art conservation that emerged in

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15   *Inside Installations: Preservation and Presentation of Installation Art* launched in 2004, was supported by the European Commission's Culture 2000 Programme, coordinated by the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage (ICN) and co-organised by five other European organisations: Tate (UK), Restaurierungszentrum Düsseldorf (Germany); Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia (Spain); Stedelijk Museum voor Aktuele Kunst (Belgium); and Foundation for the Conservation of Contemporary Art (SBMK, the Netherlands). For more information and the results of the project see the report and the publication: *Inside Installations. The preservation and presentation of installation art. Report,* 2007; Scholte & Wharton, 2011. The international symposium *Contemporary Art: Who Cares?* was held in Amsterdam in June 2010, and was organised within another European project managed by the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands (RCE) entitled *Practices, Research, Access, Collaboration, Teaching in Conservation of Contemporary Art* (*PRACTICs of Contemporary Art: The Future.* For more about the symposium see: https://www.incca.org/events/symposium-contemporary-art-who-cares-2010, for more about the PRACTICs project see: https://www.incca.org/news/project-completed-practics-contemporary-art-future.

16   See, for instance: Heydenreich, 2011; Huys, 2011.

17   See for instance: *Contemporary Art: Who Cares? Charles Esche, The Politics of Collecting within the Possible Museum* [Video file]. (2010). Netherlands: International Network for the Conservation of Contemporary Art. Retrieved from https://www.incca.org/articles/video-contemporary-artwho-cares-charles-esche-politics-collecting-within-possible-museum; *Contemporary Art: Who Cares? Peter van Mensch, A Work of Art in a Museum is a Work of Art in a Museum* [Video file]. (2010). Netherlands: International Network for the Conservation of Contemporary Art. Retrieved from https://www.incca.org/articles/video-contemporary-artwho-cares-charles-esche-politics-collecting-within-possible-museum.

response to the growing use of cutting-edge technologies in artistic practice.[18] Within this sub-specialisation, a particularly useful conceptual framework is that which conservator and researcher Pip Laurenson has established in her pioneering article *Authenticity, Change and Loss in the Conservation of Time-Based Media Installations* (Laurenson, 2006), to which I will refer frequently (see: Chapter 2). Laurenson replaces the reference 'state' of an art object with the concept of the 'identity' of an artwork, and by doing so makes it possible to perceive the 'change' in the artwork's appearance and perception as something different from 'loss', as traditionally understood in conservation. Other approaches related to media art conservation that have inspired my thinking are those of artist, curator and scholar Jon Ippolito, new media art scholar Richard Rinehart and curator and media studies scholar Annet Dekker.[19] These three academics introduced into the field of conservation a curatorial, but also, and more importantly, an artistic perspective on safeguarding today's art. Moreover, by

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18   The main platforms for research and development of best practices within this framework were Matters in Media Art: Collaborating Towards the Care of Time-Based Media (active since 2005), Documentation and Conservation of the Media Arts Heritage Research Alliance (DOCAM) and Variable Media Network (1999-2003).

    Matters in Media Art was a collaborative project between three large museums: the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) and Tate, designed to help those who collect and keep media artworks. One of its outcomes is an online information resource on caring for media; see: *Matters in Media Art*. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://mattersinmediaart.org/.

    DOCAM (Documentation and Conservation of the Media Arts Heritage) was an international research alliance on the documentation and the conservation of media arts heritage, composed of around 20 institutional partners from around the world. One of the most significant results from the project was *The DOCAM Documentation Model*. The project was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and the Daniel Langlois Foundation. For more information see: Depocas, A., Le-Phat Ho, S., Bourbonnais, J., & Melançon, C. (n.d.). *DOCAM: Documentation and Conservation of the Media Arts Heritage.* Retrieved from http://www.docam.ca/.

    Variable Media Network was conceived in the Guggenheim Museum, NY primarily to develop efficient strategies to preserve conceptual, minimalist and video art. The network, supported by the Daniel Langlois Foundation for Art, Science, and Technology conceived of other institutional members, such as Walker Art Center, Berkeley Art Museum and Rhizome.org. The project resulted in the *Variable Media Questionnaire* – free online software for decision-making related to the preservation of variable artworks, and a publication. See: Variable Media Network. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.variablemedia.net/e/welcome.html; and Depocas, A., Ippolito, J., & Jones, C. (Eds.). (2003). *Permanence Through Change: The Variable Media Approach*. New York and Montreal: Guggenheim Museum Publications and The Daniel Langlois Foundation for Art, Science, and Technology.

19   See e.g.: Rinehart & Ippolito, 2014 and Dekker, 2018.

addressing artworks with dependencies related to their digital nature, they positioned the task of preservation within the specificity of challenges and opportunities posed by the Information Age. Finally, significant advances in contemporary art conservation theory were achieved under the auspices of the Dutch project *New Strategies in the Conservation of Contemporary Art* (2009-2015).[20] Various concepts established within this framework were used as starting points for the development of the argument presented here, among them the 'biographical approach' to capturing the artwork's variability, which acknowledges not only that artworks change over time, but also advocates for interpreting these changes against the background of their social framework (van de Vall, Hölling, Scholte, & Stigter, 2011), and the notion of 'artwork as an archive' introduced by conservator and theorist Hanna Hölling (2013, 2015, 2018).

The aforementioned research networks, projects and collaborations shaped the scholarship of two further academics whose work has guided the path of my research. Firstly, cultural scientist and conservation theorist Vivian van Saaze, whose writings introduced the notion of 'doing artworks', founded on the assumption that through their practices art institutions are taking an active part in shaping works of art (2009a). Secondly, conservator and scholar Sanneke Stigter, who first mastered the artist interview in practice, has since offered courses on this method's application in conservation education, and has developed a body of critical thinking around the

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20   *New Strategies in the Conservation of Contemporary Art* was a project affiliated with Maastricht University, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Literature and Art, and led by Prof. Dr. R. van de Vall in collaboration with the University of Amsterdam (UvA) and the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands (RCE), partly funded by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO). For more information see: Stigter, S. (2013). 'Research in New Strategies in Conservation of Contemporary Art'. ICOM-CC MMCA Working Group Newsletter, 3, 8-9.

role of the conservator in shaping an artwork's biography.[21] Both of them advocate for the use of ethnographic methods in conservation-related research, a practice I have adopted by employing ethnography as one of my main research strategies.

The present project has been developed within a research and training network whose programme was conceived by the founders and participants of several preceding projects. As such, it can be seen as a continuation of these prior efforts to advance the field. The title of the network that this research is a part of – N*ACCA: New Approaches in the Conservation of Contemporary Art* – refers directly to the scope of interests of its predecessors.[22] My investigation is grounded in themes that NACCA has aimed to address – questions concerning the identity, values and authenticity of contemporary artworks, along with the organisation of institutional ecosystems and historically developed distinctions among the actors involved in caring for collections.

Although this study mainly adopts the perspective of conservation, it stands at the crossroads of other disciplines as well, in particular art history, art theory, museology, curatorship, performance, media and archival studies. In so doing, it aims to provide a broader overview of the problem, and to introduce standpoints that until now have not been present in discussions in the field of contemporary art conservation. Moreover, it aims to introduce conservation-related issues into discourses taking place in related fields, such as curatorial studies, and especially the innovative, critical approaches to the concept of museum grounded in New Institutionalism (see: Chapter 5).

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21   See, for example: Stigter, 2016. The way the notion of 'artwork's biography is referred to in this dissertation requires explanation, as it is used differently in two disciplines that this books builds on, meaning art theory and conservation. For the first one, it might be seen as akin to W.J.T. Michell's concept of 'the life of images'. However, whereas Mitchell is interested in the movement and circulation of images, and in identifying their origin and societal impact (W. J. T. Mitchell, 2005), I focus on the lives and biographies of artworks, following the tradition of Conservation. The "biographical approach to contemporary art conservation" was proposed by Vall, R. van de, Hölling, H., Scholte, T., & Stigter, S. (2011). The idea of artworks having biographies allows us to account for their variability, while still respecting their artistic integrity. "Biographical approach is that the meaning of an object and the effects it has on people and events may change during its existence, due to changes in its physical state, use, and social, cultural and historical context" (van de Vall et al., 2011).

22   For more information about the project see: Quabeck & Wielocha, 2017.

Likewise, I have also taken up the interdisciplinary ties in the field of conservation established by my predecessors, such as the links to performance studies reflected in the work of Gabriella Giannachi, or the research projects of LIMA Amsterdam (see: Chapter 4).[23]

Methods

The entangled interrelations of art museums' backstage practices related to collecting, exhibition making, collection management and collection care are rarely discussed in the literature, and existing descriptions usually present a more stable and organised perspective.[24] Reports on new approaches and solutions shared by employees of leading, large-scale contemporary art museums tend only to provide information about the outcomes of particular projects often in their pilot stages, and do not reflect the real, day-to-day workflows of an institution. Moreover, both artworks and art institutions are difficult to compare, and therefore studies generally cannot be applied across the board. In order to achieve a better understanding of the routine practices of museums related to collecting, classifying, documenting, presenting and conserving, which is necessary in order to achieve the objectives outlined above, this study employs a mixed-method approach, combining ethnographic methods with archival research.

Ethnographic methods are nowadays used broadly to study the inner mechanisms of diverse organisations and institutions, museums included. In particular, interviews and participatory observation have proven efficient in the case of both art understood as a socially constructed concept, and the art museum as an ecosystem or closed

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23   E.g. Giannachi, 2016; *UNFOLD: Mediation by Reinterpretation*, LIMA, 2016-2017.
      A practice-based research project aiming to examine re-interpretation as emerging practice for the preservation of media artworks, see: http://www.li-ma.nl/lima/article/unfold-mediation-reinterpretation.

24   However, it is important to mention that there are some outstanding examples of writings about museum practice backstage, such as *In Search of a Lost Avant-Garde: An anthropologist investigates the contemporary art museum* by curator Matti Bunzl (2014), or behind the scenes of curatorial practice such as (self)critical essay *Coda: The Curatorial* by Charles Esche (2013).

community with its inherent dynamics related to the distribution of power.[25] Fieldwork, an intrinsic part of ethnographic research, allows for the observation and analysis of the practices embedded in day-to-day institutional work. Accordingly, much of my research was performed during secondments at partner institutions, principally the Statens Museum for Kunst in Copenhagen (Chapter 3) and the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam (Chapter 4), as well as during a research residency at the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (Chapter 5).

The central motif of this study is the interview, and interviewing was one of my main methods of collecting data for analysis. Two different kinds of interviews were carried out during this investigation. The first is the artist interview, a method developed within the field of contemporary art conservation that, over the last decades, has become one of the main tools for conservation-oriented documentation and the basis for decision-making regarding conservation strategies (see: Chapter 1, p. 42). Artist interviews were both performed during the research, as well as examined among the primary sources kept in institutional records. As such, interviews were analysed from the perspective of content, production process and accessibility. The artist interview is presented in this book as an example of a novel method that complies with the theoretical development of the field of contemporary art conservation, and the case-based fieldwork examines if and how it is used as a tool, and how it functions as a source in the museums studied.

The second kind of interview is akin to what in qualitative analysis is called the semi-structured expert interview, conducted here mainly with museum professionals – curators, conservators, registrars, producers, art handlers, as well as other related specialists, such as studio managers, technicians, etc. This group of participants contributed to my understanding of the path taken by particular artworks, how they were musealised, and the institutional context that determined this process.

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25   Ethnographic methods has been used to study museum practices by cultural anthropologist Sharon Macdonald (2001b) and sociologist Albena Yaneva (2003a, 2003b). Ethnography has been successfully used for studying conservation practices within the institutional framework by Vivian van Saaze (2009) and Sanneke Stigter (2016). A remarkable example of a similar approach is the ethnographic study conducted by anthropologist MattI Bunzl at Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art (Bunzl, 2014).

A significant portion of the data analysed in this dissertation was collected through engagement with archival records. Archival research was carried out not only in all of the museums mentioned above, but also in other institutions worldwide, in New York (Museum of Modern Art), Paris (Centre Pompidou), London (Tate), Cologne (Museum Ludwig) and Otterlo (Kröller-Müller Museum). It is important to mention that the archival research consisted not only of analysis of the content, but also of reflection on the nature of the archives as such – their structure, gaps and accessibility. More than simply satisfying a series of queries, institutional records triggered a deep reflection on the role of the archive in constructing artworks' identities and consequently in determining their future. Simultaneously, archives' organisation often reflects the inherent dynamic of the hosting institution, and as such adds to the analysis of the institutional ecosystem. Observations related to the importance of the archive in relation to collected artworks and as a key to understand structures of hosting institutions laid the foundations for one of the axes of my argument.

As philosopher Renée Van de Vall argues, contemporary art conservation can only be approached through "a case-by-case method of ethical deliberation" (van de Vall, 2015a, p. 8), and this standpoint reflects the general tendency in the scholarship of the field.[26] In line with this stance and on the basis of my previous research experience, the case-study approach was also chosen as suitable for this investigation. Tracing artworks by one artist collected by various institutions enabled the study of processes related to their musealisation, an overview of the practices of each institution studied, and their subsequent comparison. Each case study is approached as a potential conservation challenge to face, and possible solutions are discussed in the respective chapters. Each artwork was selected for analysis according to several criteria. Firstly, it must comply with the definition of contemporary art as presented in Chapter 1 (see: p. 36). Secondly, it must have been collected by a museum large enough to have an established structure, i.e. departmental divisions. Thirdly, at a certain moment in its history, preferably at the time of its analysis for the purpose of this dissertation, the artwork must have

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26   The case-study approach has been used in research on contemporary art conservation
        by various scholars both from the field of conservation as well as from outside the discipline.
        E.g.: Marçal, 2018; Stigter, 2016; van Saaze, 2009a.

posed a conservation problem.[27] Fourthly, it must prove difficult to classify within the traditional taxonomic systems both in formal terms (e.g. painting, sculpture, drawing, installation, video, etc.) and within the tradition of artistic movements and genres (e.g. conceptual art, participatory art, net-art, etc.). Fifthly, the artist must be alive, and must have been involved with the institution in connection with the artwork in question at some point in its history. Sixthly, the artwork must have an extensive track record of exhibitions.

The analysis of the future legibility and shifting perceptions of artworks used as case studies was performed in line with the hermeneutic interpretation of art as understood by philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer. According to Gadamer, a work of art exists only in the private experience of an individual, i.e. when the encounter between the viewer and the work of art fosters a game of understanding what has been actually viewed and sensed (Czakon, 2016; Gadamer, 2004, 2007). Interpretation identified as an intimate game between the viewer and the artwork cannot lead to finite and final results, thus, there is neither a most accurate, or most appropriate interpretation of an artwork.

Structure and Outline

My interest in the problem of implementing novel practical and theoretical approaches to contemporary art conservation in museums originates in my own experience as a museum conservator and my acquaintance with the practices of other institutions acquired through countless conversations with colleagues from the field. Hence, the structure of the dissertation not only follows the development of the study, but also reflects and expands my intellectual involvement in and the growth of my comprehension of the researched environment.

The dissertation starts with the introductory chapter (Chapter 1), which defines four key concepts for the development of the argument: contemporary art, the artist interview, documentation and conservation. All definitions are grounded in the current

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27   Here I refer to 'conservation problem' in line with the definition of conservation as presented in Chapter 1 (see: p. 81).

discourses of the relevant fields and supported by related literature. The discussions that accompany this defining of terms lead to the formulation of the research question guiding the study, which addresses the function of the artist interview within the body of documentation related to an artwork in an institutional collection.

The core of the dissertation is formed by three case-study chapters that compile data from fieldwork, literature review and archival research (Chapters 2, 3 and 4). Their order mirrors the course of the investigation, which was divided into two phases. Data collected during Phase I, described and analysed in Chapter 2, provide a basis for reflecting on institutional collaboration with artists in relation to the artworks collected, extracting key concepts and defining problems. In grounded theory methodology this phase is called 'theoretical sampling' – initial data collection without fixed a priori theoretical assumptions (Ruppel & Mey, 2017). Having a general research topic but no firm hypothesis to start with, this study began with exploring 'familiar' or 'established' cases that confirmed and supported, but also questioned, contradicted or rejected preliminary theoretical ideas. Three notions broadly discussed in theoretical conservation scholarship have been selected as starting points for this exploration: 'artwork's meaning', 'artist's sanctions' and 'significant properties'. Each of them is tested against the case of an artwork by Mirosław Bałka in different institutional collections.[28] By mapping the interplay between these three notions, this study identifies the main sites of tension that have posed challenges for museums tasked with caring for contemporary art. As we shall see, such tensions essentially arise through the classification systems employed by institutions, which distribute works of art between different realms of the museum, and through the relationship between artists and institutions. This observation led to the establishment of three focal points to guide further empirical investigation of museums (Phase II): artwork-related documentation, the internal organisation of a museum and its practices related to collection care, and collaboration with artists on their artworks held in the collection.

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28   The choice of works by the Polish sculptor as case studies for the preliminary research was determined by my familiarity with Bałka's oeuvre and previous successful collaborations (see: Chapter 2, p. 108).

The outcome of Phase II is presented in Chapters 3 and 4, which describe and analyse case studies carried out at various museums in Europe and the US. Both chapters scrutinise the condition of the contemporary artworks collected by museums, analyse institutional museum–artist collaboration practices that are oriented towards caring for contemporary artworks, and look at how this collaboration is recorded in artwork-related documentation. Chapter 3 looks at museums as collectors of objects and considers how their traditional, object-driven classificatory principles influence their practices related to caring for contemporary works of art. Auxiliary notions such as 'art project' and 'artwork constituency' support a better understanding of the processes related to the musealisation of contemporary artworks, and make evident how inherent features of the 'new kind of art', combined with the current museum procedures, have turned musealisation into a potential threat to the artwork's integrity. The case study presented in Chapter 3 considers an art project by Danh Vo that resulted in three artefacts, each collected by a large institution. What we find is that in the museum, the identity of the contemporary artwork, distributed between physical objects and the stories which contextualise them, becomes divided between two institutional realms – the collection and the archive – which are governed by different rules and procedures. The case demonstrates that, whereas institutions invest in care for the objects in their collection and do their best to ensure that they remain in optimal conditions, the documentation that often carries the bulk of an artwork's identity tends to be largely overlooked.

The above observations are confirmed in Chapter 4, which analyses in detail the distribution of a particular contemporary artwork between various domains of the museum, and the consequences this has had for the artwork's perpetuation. The piece in question, by Barbara Kruger, lacks stable material representation and exists in the museum as a set of digital files. By reflecting on the foundations of the museum as a concept, this chapter proposes that upon musealisation the artwork transforms into stories recorded in documents that represent the artwork. In the digital era, where these stories are stored as records in databases, the quality of this representation follows the logic of accumulation – more stories that interact with each other allow for a more accurate picture of the artwork. The chapter notices, however, that this interaction, does not happen on its own – it needs to be fostered by means of research. The investigation into the above-mentioned theoretical concepts brings into focus complex

interpersonal relationships that govern the institutional collecting of contemporary art and influence the collaboration between artists and institutions. Through critical analysis of the interview conducted with the artist, scrutinised both as a method and as a source, I show how these relationships might impact the implementation of novel methods for the institutional care of contemporary artworks.

Chapter 5 summarises the findings of the empirical part of the study. It confirms the hypothesis that the problem with implementing novel contemporary art conservation methods in art museums is linked to the object-based principles governing museum organisation and guiding collection-care practices, in addition to the complex relationship between artists and art institutions. Building on the concept of 'artwork-related documentation' and the notion of anarchives borrowed from Siegfried Zielinski and introduced in Chapter 1, this chapter proposes a solution that might help in solving the identified problems. It features a model of the 'artwork-as-an-(an) archive', aimed to help in adapting the existing museum structure to the needs of contemporary art. The model is supported here by examples of institutional practices that have built on a similar argument: that the museum's traditional division between objects and documents, and in consequence collection and archive, is obsolete in the face of contemporary art. Possible ways of implementing the model in today's museums are presented through examples of innovative documentation strategies that partially comply with the model's specifications. Furthermore, the issues of the accessibility of artwork-related documents and the willingness to share them – one of the requirements for the successful implementation of the model – are discussed in relation to the examples from the empirical portion of the study. The final section addresses the artist interview and discusses its possible functions within the proposed model. The understanding of contemporary artworks as archives transforms the artist interview as method into a full-fledged tool for collecting and conserving; seen as a source, it re-emerges as a significant part of the artwork to be collected. What is more, the artist interview is identified as a method for collaboration within the space of the artwork understood as an archive, and thus for negotiating its shape and content. As a research tool it fosters interaction among the archive's records. Finally, the artist interview as a source might be used as a 'key' to the archive – an interpretative tool used to analyse and unravel it.

Chapter 1

Contemporary Art, the Artist Interview, Documentation and Conservation: Establishment of terms and survey of practices

1.1 Introduction: Foundations of a conceptual framework

Since the early 1990s, the artist interview has gained considerable attention, becoming a significant research and documentation method in the conservation of contemporary art.[29] Its development, far from following a straight trajectory, has been interwoven with advances throughout the field, and has continually changed in relation to current discourses. The last two decades have witnessed efforts towards enriching the method through the improvement of related skills, establishing a theoretical framework to place the interview within the range of conservation tools, as well as examining its value in practice. Most of the literature on the subject approaches the artist interview as an efficient tool that supports decision-making with respect to a particular case study. In other words, authors tend to focus on how the dialogue with the artist helped in resolving a specific conservation problem, whether present or future.[30]

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[29] The history of the artist interview for conservation purposes is outlined later on in this chapter (see: p. 42).

[30] E.g.: Campbell, J. T. (2013). Living artists and the conservation of contemporary objects: preserving an aesthetic of decay. In L. Kaplan, K. Dodson, & E. Hamilton (Eds.), *American Institute for Conservation of Historic & Artistic Works*. Objects Specialty Group Postprints, 20, 195–206; Sheesley, S. (2007). Artist interviews as tools for diligent conservation practice. *American Institute for Conservation of Historic & Artistic Works*. Book and Paper Specialty Group Postprints, 26, 161–165.

This book, by contrast, adopts a different approach. By studying the constellation of associations between the artwork, the artist and the institution, it looks at the interview as a tool used in museums, and studies its implementation and functions in the processes related to institutional collecting.

This chapter aims to lay the groundwork for the investigation and analysis of the outcome of this study, by reconsidering the notion of the artist interview together with three related concepts – the 'contemporary artwork', its 'documentation', and its 'conservation' in the museum context. The way the particular concepts and phenomena are presented here is influenced by the research covered in the following chapter, as well as my own experience as a conservator and museum professional. The chapter begins with a reflection on the notion of contemporary art and the identification of defining features of contemporary artworks. These will serve later as a key reference for constructing a theoretical and conceptual framework for this research. The second section focuses on interviews with artists. It starts by contextualising them as a genre in the field of visual art and curatorship, then moving on to the discipline of conservation. The history of the artist interview as a conservation-related research method is presented together with a brief overview of the literature addressing this issue. After introducing debates on the notion of 'artist intent', the argument then reflects on the similarities between the theoretical and methodological grounds of the artist interview and oral history theory, and, lastly, concludes with a proposed working definition of the artist interview, intended for further examination during the empirical part of the study. To ground this investigation in the area of collection-related practices, the third section contextualises the artist interview within the institutional ecosystem by presenting it as a part of the artwork's documentation. The latter is approached from the perspective of recent practices and discourses in visual art, which observes the blurring of the boundary between the artwork and its documentation. The next part touches upon the rising importance of documentation as a conservation tool and the challenges related to documenting contemporary art within the museum setting. It concludes by proposing a conceptual model for the documentation of an artwork within the context of an institutional collection, questioning the hierarchization of the elements in both the archive and collection. The last issue scrutinized is the notion of conservation, which, especially in the context of contemporary art, is currently undergoing significant changes. Because it is important to clarify what this book

understands by 'conservation', a working definition of the term is offered, adjusted to the needs of the argument. Out of this analysis, the chapter converges on a pressing research question that will guide the empirical portion of the study, asking what the functions and uses of the artist interview are in relation to the body of documentation produced around institutionally collected artworks.

1.2 Contemporary Art, Contemporary Artwork

> Today's artistic events cannot be preserved and contemplated like traditional artworks. However, they can be documented, 'covered', narrated and commented on. Traditional art produced art objects. Contemporary art produces information about art events. (Groys, 2016)

In common parlance, contemporary art is art created during our own lifetime. Following this line of reasoning, and paraphrasing the text from a well-known neon installation by Maurizio Nannucci that once shone over the main entrance to the Altes Museum in Berlin, all art has been contemporary during the time in which it was produced.[31] Nevertheless, this popular designation is a relative one, and is rarely employed today within the framework of art theory and art criticism. Therefore, since this dissertation confronts problems related to the conservation of a particular kind of art, its main subject needs to be clearly defined from the outset. Interestingly, this approach is rare in the field of conservation of contemporary art, and in my view this absence is a weak point of the current theoretical discussions in the field.[32] Consequently, using writings by various scholars as a starting point, this section aims to clarify how the notion of contemporary art will be understood and employed throughout the pages of this book.

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31   Maurizio Nannucci, *All Art Has Been Contemporary* (1999–2011), neon, transformer, clips, currently in the collection of Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. See: https://www.mfa.org/collections/object/all-art-has-been-contemporary-549280.

32   As conservator and scholar Paolo Martore has aptly noted, in conservation literature the term 'contemporary art' is imprecise and "seems to allude to artworks made of heterodox material and techniques confronted to the 'tradition', within an incredible wide range of expressive trends" (Martore, 2009, p. 2).

The first, most intuitive, and self-evident definition of the term is linked to the relation between the date of an artwork's creation and an audience's position in time, which would mean current, contemporary to 'us' or, following the words of philosopher and art theorist Boris Groys, "being immediately present, as being here-and-now" (Groys, 2009). However, in recent discourses 'contemporary art' is presented not as a temporal marker but rather a separate phenomenon or distinctive condition within the historical tradition of artistic movements.[33] As such, it might be approached in two ways: firstly, from the chronological perspective as an epoch which started at a certain time and continues until now; secondly, as a condition of art, a new paradigm of artistic practice, that can be characterized in a certain way, and which addresses certain issues and has a certain formal shape.

One commonly discussed understanding of the term is related to the periodization in art history; however, even this categorization is not a fixed one and discussions are still ongoing. In most interpretations, 'contemporary art' is in a way a succession, direct or indirect, of the 'Modern' as a philosophy which dominated art in the 20th century. In this sense, the demands of the contemporary could be understood as opposing the main postulate of Western modernity, namely continual progress. As Groys summarizes, "contemporary art is different from Modern art that was directed toward the future [...]. The contemporary 'contemporary art' privileges the present in respect to the future and to the past" (Groys, 2007). Art historian and critic Claire Bishop has pertinently noticed that "until the late 1990s, it [contemporary art] seemed synonymous with 'postwar', denoting art after 1945; about ten years ago, it was relocated to start somewhere in the 1960s" (Bishop, 2013, p. 16). Currently, the start of the 'contemporary art era' has been pushed forward to the end of the 1980s, the fall of communism, the emergence of digital culture and the rise of neo-liberalism (Alexander Alberro in Foster, 2009, p. 55). Nevertheless, it is not a precise date that marks the beginning of the 'contemporary', but rather a set of historical, social and cultural occurrences which have been discussed at length in the literature. For instance, art historian Terry Smith, in his seminal book What is Contemporary Art, points at three sets of forces that shape

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33   Following the growing popularity and use of the term it has been critically approached by many thinkers from fields of art history, art theory and philosophy. A significant compilation of texts on this issue is the *Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary'* edited by Hal Foster and published in the journal *October* (Foster, 2009).

'contemporaneity' not only as a denomination in the arts, but also as the "attribute of the current world picture": globalisation, inequity among peoples and the immersion of society into an 'infoscape' (T. Smith, 2009, pp. 5–6). In his view, the shift from modern to contemporary originated in the 1950s, emerged on the scene in the 1960s and became evident in the 1980s.

From an institutional perspective, the location of the contemporary as a phenomenon in time is convenient, as it follows art history's traditional, chronological, linear narrative and allows for easy categorisation of which artworks fulfil this category and which do not.[34] Nevertheless, the second understanding of the term 'contemporary art', regarding the paradigm shift in artistic practice, is the one favoured in this dissertation. Among other attributes, this shift can be characterised as addressing the dichotomy of artworks' concept and objecthood, which is pertinent in terms of the direction in which the field of contemporary art conservation has developed in recent decades (see: Introduction, p. 15). Accordingly, this dichotomy has been employed as a lens for selecting writings by art theorists in order to lay the foundations of the theoretical framework developed in this chapter, and to identify references which will serve for further theoretical explorations. The aim of gathering together diverse ideas that reflect the heterogeneity of the concept of 'contemporary art' is not to provide an explanation of the term, but rather to present the reader with a set of concepts as a basis for understanding the origins and backdrops of the questions and concerns presented in this dissertation.

The first category is 'post-conceptual', as introduced by philosopher Peter Osborne. It is understood not as a designation for a particular type of art, but as a historical-ontological condition. According to Osborne, contemporary art has a post-conceptual character, which can be indicated within the dialectical constellation of the aesthetic as well as conceptual and distributive aspects of art (Osborne, 2010). What this means is that, first of all, Osborne's post-conceptual artwork can no longer be conceived of as a closed, autonomous or self-sufficient entity that remains identical to itself everywhere

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34   For example, this chronological perspective is applied as an organising principle by Centre Pompidou. See: Chapter 3, p. 202.

and at all times (Osborne, 2013). Autonomous art in this context is understood as an 'art for art's sake' and conceived outside of the framework of social dependencies. By contrast, Osbourne's contemporary artwork can take on different shapes depending on the context (Prinz, 2017, p. 55). It is rather "a radically distributive [...] unity of the individual artwork across the totality of its multiple material instantiations, at any particular time" (Osborne, 2010). Osborne also opposes the modernist concept of medium-specificity to the idea of 'contemporary' as a 'transmedia' or 'post-medium' condition, in line with the writings of art historian Rosalind Krauss (Krauss, 1999).

Another appealing concept is the one proposed by art historian David Joselit in his controversial book After Art. With reference to the art produced today, he does away with the concept of medium, aiming to expand the definition of art by embracing "heterogeneous configurations of relationships and links" (Joselit, 2012, p. 2). He argues that despite the changes to the development of artistic practices introduced in the 20th century, most "art historical interpretation continues to depart from the presumption that objects are its fundamental units of analysis – even if it's recognized that since Conceptual Art, artworks have become unconventional and provisional sorts of things" (Joselit, 2012, p. 43). In opposition to such reasoning, Joselit introduces the notion of 'format', namely a constellation of links or connections between people, objects, spaces, events and so on. 'Mediums' in his theory are subsets of 'formats', as he sees the difference mostly in the scale and flexibility of the latter. Still, in his view the 'medium' is an obsolete notion characterised as "analogue in a digital world" (Joselit, 2012, p. 52).

The third voice in the discussion is that of Boris Groys. In his seminal essay *Topology of Contemporary Art*, the Russian-German philosopher argues that the leading form of contemporary art is the installation. Yet, for Groys, an installation can consist of individual paintings, "since the crucial aspect of the painting as an artwork is not the fact that it was produced by an artist but that it was selected by an artist and presented as something selected" (Groys, 2007, para. 11). Contrary to traditional material supports, among which he includes both canvas and film, the medium of installation is the space. Groys also builds his argument on the dichotomy of 'modern' and 'contemporary', pointing out that while the former was oriented towards an individual

form, the latter "is working on the level of context, framework, background, or of a new theoretical interpretation" (Groys, 2007, para. 11). That is why, in Groys's opinion, contemporary art is less related to the production of individual objects, and is, rather, a "manifestation of an individual decision to include or to exclude things and images that circulate anonymously in our world – to give them a new context or to deny it to them: a private selection that is at the same time publicly accessible and thereby made manifest, present, explicit" (Groys, 2007, para. 11).

There are other phenomena present in the discourse surrounding the definition of 'contemporary art' that I find important to introduce as referential to the use of the term within this study. Foremost among them is the current rise of process-based practices in art, taken in the broad sense. By process-based I mean both 'process art' in which the process of creation is emphasized as equal or even superior to its end product, and time-based art, such as performance, where the process itself is an artwork in its own right.[35] I would argue that, considering the increased importance of how the artwork has been made and all activities related to the creative act, contemporary artworks are potentially process-based to some extent.[36] The second tendency, which is directly interlinked with the previous one, is art that understands itself as research, where research is considered a part of the artistic process and is carried out by the artist him or herself (Busch, 2009). In this context, the character of the research borrows from academics, and might be carried out using historical, sociological or ethnographical methods. For this type of art, research is not a preliminary phase but rather constitutes the work itself.[37] However, these two conditions do not exclude the possibility that

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35   There are several tendencies in fine art practice that fit into this definition, e.g. relational art as coined in 1998 by Nicolas Bourriaud, see: Bourriaud, N. (2010). *Relational aesthetics*. Dijon: Les Presses du réel; or occupational realism as defined by Julia Bryan-Wilson, see: Bryan-Wilson, J. (2012). *Occupational Realism*. The Drama Review, (Winter 2012), pp. 32–48.

36   Process-based is a denomination of artistic strategies acknowledged as important since at least the time of Fluxus. As noticed by Andreas Broeckmann, an art historian specialized in media art and digital culture, one can speak about process-orientation in artistic practices in cases where the evolving process itself is a main factor of the aesthetic experience of the artwork (Broeckmann, 2005).

37   This drive in contemporary art has been described by Hal Foster in his seminal article *Artist as ethnographer?* See: Foster, H. (1995). The Artist as Ethnographer? In G. E. Marcus & F. R. Myers (Eds.), *The traffic in culture. Refiguring art and anthropology* (pp. 302–309). Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.

processes, such as research, can be presented by conventional means of visual art, such as video or photographic documentation or even an art object like a painting or sculpture. The approach to the notion of 'contemporary art' beyond the chronological category within the history of visual art exists also outside of the fields of art history and art criticism. In line with these observations, sociologist Nathalie Heinich proposes that contemporary art should be considered as a new paradigm of artistic practice, an aesthetic category within the arts. Within this framework she offers a contention that "the artwork is no longer exclusively the actual object proposed by the artist, but rather the whole set of operations, actions, interpretations, etc., brought about by this proposition" (Heinich, 2014, p. 35).

To summarize, the way the term 'contemporary art' will be used in this study is less related to a particular moment in time or an art-historical period, but rather to art which may comply with certain features that can be defined as four framing aspects: conceptuality (in terms of the balance between concepts and their outcomes, which may or may not be object-based), contextuality (in terms of social/historical/cultural dependencies), media-variability (as opposed to media-specificity) and processuality (a rise in the importance of processes for results, as well as durability in time).[38] It does not mean that these aspects are equally significant in all contemporary artworks, but that all contemporary artworks might encompass each of these aspects to a certain degree and, while being investigated as collectibles, they should be examined against all of them. This bundle of traits shares a common denominator in the artwork's potentiality for change. In this dissertation, this aspect will be covered by the term 'changeability', as introduced by conservation theorist Hanna Hölling. In her writings, Hölling juxtaposes this notion with 'variability' as established by the *Variable Media Initiative* (Depocas, Ippolito, & Jones, 2003), which presumes a variation within fixed, predefined parameters and implies reliance upon a mean value (Hölling, 2013, 2015). Changeability, on the other hand, may surpass any fixed parameters. In practical terms this means that an artwork can exist in various forms, even beyond those that were

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38   Similar categories have been identified by Miriam La Rosa in her research addressing
      contradictions in the terms employed by contemporary art museums regarding collecting.
      La Rosa points to the three-dimensional identity of contemporary artwork, which is contextual,
      processual and conceptual. See: La Rosa, 2013.

assigned during the initial phase of the creative process. For Hölling this changeability can be driven by both extrinsic and intrinsic factors and is contingent on time and context.[39]

To apply this discourse within the framework of a museum, one additional remark is required. Following the lead of earlier discourses, this dissertation will distinguish between 'artworks' and 'art objects'. Both terms commonly circulate in the fields to which this study relates – art history and conservation – and are often used interchangeably. Nevertheless, as this study argues, in the case of contemporary art the substance and identity of the artwork lies beyond its physical embodiment, which, in the context of a museum collection, we will be calling an 'art object'. This distinction will prove convenient later on for our analysis of museum practices, as it allows us to separate between conservation's approach to the work as an 'artwork' and as an 'object'.[40]

1.3   Interviewing the Artist and the Artist Interview

1.3.1   Interviews with Artists as a Genre

> What the manifesto was to modern art, the interview is to contemporary art: the principal vehicle of public relations and vital theoretical supplement to artistic practice. (D. Miller, 2009, p. 7)

In the course of the 20th century, artists' utterances have become pervasive within the world of visual art. Nearly every exhibition catalogue contains an interview with or a statement by an artist. Nearly every exhibition is accompanied by interviews published in cultural sections of magazines with the aim to promote the event and

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39   The growing acknowledgment of change as one of the artwork's features is not only specific to the conservation of modern and contemporary art. For instance, changing perceptions of time is one of the criteria in Ernst van Wetering's decision making model. See: Ernst van de Wetering (1978). Not published. Related source: van Wetering, 1979.

40   A similar consideration was presented by philosopher and conservation theorist Renée van de Vall while addressing the issue of change: "we need to distinguish between changes which have an impact on the work as an artwork, and thereby on the range of appropriate interpretations, and changes which only affect the work as an object, leaving its possible interpretations unchanged" (van de Vall, 2015b, p. 296).

encourage attendance. Live conversations with renowned artists (and by renowned curators) organized by museums and universities attract large audiences.[41] Furthermore, interviews with artists occupy a key place in the interpretation and understanding of the creative act and are an important source of reference for critics and art historians.

This dissertation approaches the museum both as an ecosystem and as the institutional reflection of the diversity of the art world, and therefore considers conservation-related issues as an inherent part of general discourses in art and vice-versa.[42] Following this line of reasoning, before discussing the peculiarities of the interview understood as an established research tool in conservation, this section presents how the method unfolded in the more general framework of the art world. Building on the writings of art historians, curators and art critics, it offers a contextualisation of the conservation-related artist interview within the broader genre. Furthermore, it points to issues that are overlooked in the conservation-related literature, mainly the artists' perspective on the possibilities that interviews offer and the creative potential that the method presents for all participants involved.

Relying on the writings of philosopher Arnold Gehlen, Swiss art historian Christoph Lichtin traces the popularity of interviewing in visual art back to the first decades of the 20th century (Lichtin, 2016). In his view, the need for artists' comments was elicited

41   A key example is the popularity of books and events by Hans Ulrich Obrist, curator, critic and art historian. Obrist is author of the ongoing, expansive Interview Project, in which he carries out conversations with major cultural figures. Twenty-eight of the interviews, with artists such as Jeff Koons, Wolfgang Tillmans, John Baldessari and Christian Boltanski, have been published so far in the book series entitled *The Conversation Series*, published by Walther König, Cologne. In 2006 at the Serpentine Gallery Obrist organized the 24-hour Interview Marathon, which included, in addition to artists such as Gilbert and George, Richard Hamilton and Damien Hirst, writers, scientists and historians. See: Simonini, 2013.

42   The notion of the 'art world' was introduced by Arthur Danto in 1964, as an answer to the changes in aesthetic production in the 1950s and 1960s. According to Danto "to see something as art requires something the eye cannot descry – an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an art world" (Danto, 1964). The art world is a realm in which artists, museums, collectors and others create and discuss developments in art as well as a context in which a work can be seen as an artwork (van Maanen, 2009). A comparative study of approaches to the art world as practiced by philosophers, art theorists and sociologists such as Dickie, Becker, Bourdieu, Heinich, and Luhmann is provided by van Maanen (2009). Interestingly, while the idea that conservation is a part of the art world seems to be indisputable, many conservators approach this notion in the same terms as the art market, and intuitively locate themselves along its margins.

by a gap between art and its audience related to the abandonment of representation in visual arts.[43] The emergence of the interview is, according to Lichtin, a direct consequence of the advent of artists' statements contextualising their work, such as art manifestos, and the need to embed the artistic creation within a theoretical framework. Lichtin locates the beginnings of the institutionalisation of interviews with artists in the 1920s, when journals such as *De Stijl* or *L'espirit nouveau* dedicated entire columns to the genre. From the outset, the subject of these interviews varied from a broad focus on an artist's life and convictions to the story of one particular artwork. Exploring the correlation between an artist and his or her creation in terms of purpose, intention and context was always the main interest behind the interview.

Art critic Daniel Miller (2009) positions the shift in the significance of the interview in the 20th-century art world nearer to the present than Lichtin, and links it directly to the rise of reciprocal interest between visual art and philosophy dating back to the 1960s. According to Miller, since that time, what is said about the work of art is as significant as the work of art itself, and in the contemporary, highly intellectual art environment "there is no way that the interview can be distinguished from art" (D. Miller, 2009, p. 9). He also points at another function of the medium, discussing the interview as a principal vehicle for public relations, namely networking. This idea is presented in Miller's writings as follows:

> The heart of the interview is contained in the stances and protocols, complicities, postures and passwords which artists accrue in the practice of opening channels, and keeping them open. In fact, the interview serves both as a clinic in which abiding patterns are seen to and as a laboratory in which new connections are forged. (D. Miller, 2009, p. 8)

Yet, in the context of the art world the interview may be a tool for networking and building status and reputation not only for interviewees, but also for interviewers. In *An anatomy of the interview* Iwona Blazwick, a curator with extensive experience

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43   A similar opinion can be found in the writings of art historian Robert Goldwater. In the second edition of his prominent anthology *Artists on Art* published in 1974, Goldwater attributed the increasing enthusiasm among artists to 'use' the interview to the desire to bridge what he described as the widening 'gap' between themselves and the public (Bickers, 2007).

as an interviewer, discusses the relationship of authority between both parties involved in the conversation (Blazwick, 2007). Blazwick offers a brief overview of different strategies that interviewers employ within the genre, starting with that of 'interrogator' and 'prosecutor'. The first consists of asking questions strictly following a script and without entering into a dialogue, whereas the second, adopted mostly by journalists, involves continuous attempts to challenge the respondent. According to Blazwick, most critics, historians and curators usually adopt a different position – that of biographer, researcher and, most importantly, collaborator. This approach is not only more efficient and results in more interesting outcomes, but is also potentially beneficial for the interviewer. The special trust granted by the celebrated artist shifts the status of the interviewer to that of a 'privileged' person. Simply put, he or she might be written into art history along with the interviewed artist (Blazwick, 2007, p. 26).[44]

Yet, besides acting as a stage for artists to express and explain their ideas and a tool for social relations, the interview also provides space for them to implement or continue the artistic strategies used in their work.[45] On the one hand, the medium is a place for developing a persona – a constructed alter ego of the artist, a public image intertwined with the artistic creation or even an integral part of it. The classic example of this strategy is Andy Warhol, who consciously shaped his public image as a 'pop-artist' in numerous interviews given to the media. He often took on the role of the "dumb teenager" who had apparently "fallen for the goofiness of pop culture", stating that he painted soup cans because he thought they looked nice, or when asked about his use of images from race riots, explained that they had simply "caught his eye" (Lichtin, 2016, p. 119). On the other hand, artists often employ interviews as an artistic medium. In *Between the Frames* (1983-1992), a seminal project by Antoni Muntadas, the artist

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44   A representative example is journalist and art critic Calvin Tomkins, whose impressive career
        was launched by a series of interviews with Marcel Duchamp.

45   There are numerous examples of the 'creative' employment of the 'interview with artist' as
        a genre, and among the renowned characters from the art world who mastered this strategy
        we find, among others, Marcel Duchamp (Lichtin, 2016). An interesting instance, worth
        mentioning in this frame of reference, is the story of Sigmar Polke fabricating an interview with
        Gerhard Richter. The fictitious Richter from the interview claimed that his works had served
        as instruments of torture in concentration camps and that his paintings had killed Stalin. The
        idea behind the project was a reflection on the issues related to art and power that accompanied
        German artists in the post-World War II context (Hindahl, 2015).

interviewed art dealers, collectors, critics, academics and museum professionals to portray the 1980s art world and reveal the structures that regulate the way in which art is made, marketed, and communicated to the public. The work consists of video-recorded interviews organized in thematic 'chapters' which are presented and collected as separate artworks.[46] The final outcome of the long-term project is a large multi-media installation entitled *Between the Frames: The Forum*, for which the artist designed an architectural structure that produces a physical 'forum', a space designated for discussion in which the voices of the interviewees are woven together. Since transcripts of the interviews were published in a book, they also might be used as a documentary source.[47]

These diverse facets of the interview – a platform for the creation of an artistic 'self', a networking tool, or an artistic medium in its own right – intertwine, overlap and intersect within the framework of the art world. One example of this multifaceted character is the work of American artist Doug Aitken, who for more than a decade has been involved in conversations with other artists representing many different areas, from visual art to music. Some of his recent conversations have been published online on a platform called *The Source*, which provides access to 23 video-recorded interviews with other artists. These conversations are shot as autonomous video pieces (Aitken, n.d.). The platform is a publicly accessible artwork in its own right, and at the same time a presentation of Aitken's artistic research and a source of other artists' stories.

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46 For example, *Between the Frames. Chapter 4: The Museum* (1991) was collected by MoMA, NY and by Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid (see: https://www.moma. org/collection/works/118385 and https://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/collection/artwork/ between-frames-chapter-4-museum).

47 More information about Muntadas's *Between the Frames: The Forum* is available online. For transcripts, see: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona. (2011). Colección MACBA. Muntadas. Between the Frames: The Forum (Barcelona), 1983-1993 (2011). Retrieved May 24, 2018, from https://www.macba.cat/en/exhibition-muntadas. For a transcript of the final edit of the installation audio, see the publication made on the occasion of the 2011 exhibition: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona. (2011). Colección MACBA. Muntadas. Between the Frames: The Forum (Barcelona), 1983-1993 (2011). Retrieved from https://www.macba. cat/en/exhibition-muntadas

Finally, the interview with the artist is a research tool that offers the possibility of grasping a notion of the artist's way of envisaging reality, thereby providing insight into the nature of the work of art. Interestingly, Blazwick's accurate, although personal, explanation of what this tool actually offers does not centre on collecting facts, but rather on understanding, relating and contextualising. Descriptions of method and technique ground the work in process. Formal strategies may be situated within an ideological framework, or understood within the context of a zeitgeist that expands out from the subjective, lived experience of the artist within a cultural and socio-political context. We establish, perhaps unconsciously, an empathetic relationship with the art object as its autonomy is inflected with a psychology, a voice (Blazwick, 2007, p. 27). Blazwick acknowledges that the interview, despite promising veracity by providing access to the primary source and the delusion of the 'true confession', it is in fact a "beautiful construct" – a self-conscious performance by the participants, edited and reconstructed for a third party, namely the audience (Blazwick, 2007, p. 27).

Within the milieu of visual art, interviews with artists represent a multidimensional genre of its own. Since conservation of contemporary art is performed within the same context, be it inside or outside of the museum framework, and accordingly influenced by characteristics and dynamics of the art world, the conservation-oriented artist interview might be seen as a variation on this genre. In consequence, all issues discussed in this section – the interview as a continuation of or complement to the artist's practice, its creative potential, its role as a status builder and a tool for forging social connections, and its features as a research tool – are equally pertinent for the method investigated in this dissertation. As such, the question that arises from this assumption is what differentiates 'an interview with an artist' from 'the artist interview', and whether this distinction is even necessary. To address this issue, we must first introduce the history and development of conservation-related artist interviews.

1.3.2   Interviewing Artists for Conservation Purposes: A brief history

Direct communication between artists and the keepers of their work focused on preservation-related issues is a relatively recent phenomenon – the term 'artist interview', which is nowadays widely used in the field, was only coined around two

decades ago.[48] However, as made explicit in numerous related writings, an exchange of information between these two parties began to take place in the early 20th century, principally in written form (Cangia, 2013; Chiantore & Rava, 2013; Hummelen & Scholte, 2012; Weyer & Heydenreich, 2005). This need was driven by the rise in the employment of non-traditional materials in art production, related both to the new artistic practices that emerged at the beginning of the 20th century, as well as the development of the art-supply industry.[49] The keepers were interested in gathering data regarding the techniques and methods used by artists in their work – factual information necessary to develop suitable conservation strategies.

According to the literature on the subject, one of the first initiatives to collect information from living artists for conservation-related purposes was undertaken by German art historian Franz Büttner Pfänner zu Thal, who employed a written questionnaire (Weyer & Heydenreich, 2005).[50] Another historical example of a similar endeavour took place in the first half of 20th century in the Netherlands. In 1939, the Committee of Paintings of the Community of Amsterdam sent a letter to living artists who had sold their paintings to the Stedelijk Museum, asking them for their opinion on future conservation treatment. The letter, in the form of a questionnaire, included queries about the use of materials and relating to specific subjects like the possible removal of varnish, or approaches to conservation treatments such as lining (Hummelen & Scholte, 2012).

Due to the acceleration of the evolution of artistic practices after WWII, the second half of the 20th century witnessed the emergence of further research projects involving communication between conservators and artists. For instance, between 1978 and

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48   As I will explain further on, the term 'artist interview' was coined around the turn of the 20th century (see:).

49   The use of manufactured art materials, which proliferated in the second half of the 19th century, was to have major consequences for the field of conservation. Manufacturers began modifying the traditional recipes and experimenting with components, and this influenced the stability of the paints, grounds, canvases, etc.

50   This example, widely cited in the literature, is located by Weyer & Heydenreich (2005, p. 385-388) at the beginning of the 20th century, but without providing an exact date. According to the authors, the project of Büttner Pfänner zu Thal was referenced in the 1903 book *Über die Mal-Technik by Adolf Keim* (Adolf Wilhelm Keim, Über Mal-Technik, Leipzig 1903, pp. 97-98).

1981, Heinz Althöfer and Hiltrud Schinzel from the Restaurierungszentrum in Düsseldorf invited selected artists represented in the collection of the Düsseldorf Kunstmuseum to participate in a survey whose aim was to gather information for conservation purposes. Questions were designed individually for each case study, and despite the standard issues like the specification of materials, they also alluded to problems of possible replacements and potential collaboration in the conservation process (Weyer & Heydenreich, 2005). Moreover, Althöfer and Schinzel's research project contained new documentation strategies, like a video recording showing the artist at work (Chiantore & Rava, 2013). In 1979, German conservator Erich Ganzert-Castrillo published his *Archive for Techniques and Materials of Contemporary Artists*, which compiles data from questionnaires on artistic practice completed by hundreds of artists from German-speaking countries.[51] Remarkably, according to the author the publication attracted the attention of many artists, collectors, art teachers and art historians, while interest among conservators was rather limited (Ganzert-Castrillo, 2005, pp. 284–289). Another study of artists' opinions about and possible participation in conservation was conducted in the mid-1980s by Swiss conservators Wilhelm Stebler and Emil Bosshard. According to Weyer & Heydenreich, the investigation set out from the assumption that an artist has a certain right to interfere in the conservation decision-making process. Interestingly, in an article that summarized the results of the project, Stebler warned against the overvaluation of an artist's opinion in relation to particular conservation tasks, while at the same time acknowledging its value as a point of departure for defining 'the concept' behind the artwork (Weyer & Heydenreich, 2005).[52]

As a result of the method employed in all the aforementioned examples – namely a written questionnaire – communication between the involved parties was essentially unidirectional. This approach changed at the beginning of the 1990s with the Artists Documentation Program (ADP), the pioneering initiative of Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, then chief conservator at the Menil Collection in Houston. Initially, the goal

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51   Ganzert-Castrillo, E. Archiv für Technik und Arbeitsmaterialien zeitgenössischer Künstler, Ferdinand Enke Verlag, Stuttgart 1979, 1996.

52   Stebler, W., Technische Auskünfte von Künstlern, in: Maltechnik Restauro, 1/85, pp. 19-34 and p. 20, after: Weyer & Heydenreich, 1999.

of the project was to inform the caretakers at the Menil about artists' views on the conservation of their work and to provide information about materials and techniques. However, the primary objective of fact-finding shifted to a much broader documentary focus, mostly due to the innovative approach of Mancusi-Ungaro. She decided to use as her method the video-recorded interview, conducted in the presence of artworks that elicit the interviewees' memories. Structured as a conversation between an artist and a conservator, its intent was to grant artists the freedom to discuss their concerns about the artwork's future. As ADP was an initiative of a collecting institution, interviews were focused on a particular artwork (or group of artworks) from their holdings. Still, these conversations mainly addressed the materiality of the works, and consisted of straightforward fact-oriented questions.[53] Artists' thoughts, interests and intentions were meant to lead to an understanding of the meaning of the materials and the way they were used in the artwork (Mancusi-Ungaro, 2005).[54]

The ADP was an inspiration for two subsequent projects: *Artists' Interviews* and *Artists' Interviews / Artists' Archives*, carried out in the Netherlands in 1998-1999 (Hummelen, Menke, Petovic, Sillé, & Scholte, 1999) and 2001-2004 (Hummelen, 2005), respectively, in a collaboration between the former Institute for Cultural Heritage

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53 This is clearly observable in the interview conducted by Mancusi-Ungaro with Lawrence Weiner, one of the central figures of American conceptual art and one of the first to conceive the work of art in opposition to a static object. The conservator starts the conversation by introducing herself and the objective of the conversation: "I am a conservator, Carol Mancusi-Ungaro. I am interested in preserving things – physical stuff." Weiner responds with hesitation: "I am perplexed, because the nature of the work is that it's a specific object without a specific form" (Weiner, L. (2008, January 16). Lawrence Weiner Interview Transcript [Interview by C. Mancusi-Ungaro]. Retrieved from http://adp.menil.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/adp2008b_weiner_transcript.pdf. The interview is part of the Artists Documentation Program, a collaboration of the Menil Collection, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art, Harvard Art Museums.

54 In 2011, a grant from the Andrew Mellon Foundation allowed for the organization of the collected data and to make information available to the public through an online database (Cooke, 2011). Currently, the archive website lists the names of 39 artists who have been interviewed either directly, or via an interview with an assistant or spouse, or even Menil Founding Director Walter Hopps, who discusses the work of Edward Kienholz. Some entries, for instance in the case of Mel Chin, consist of two interviews – the first conducted in 1991 and a follow-up in 2014. See: Artists Documentation Program. Retrieved from http://adp.menil.org/

(ICN) and the Foundation for the Conservation of Contemporary Art (SBMK).[55] Twenty artists active in the Netherlands, both Dutch and foreign, were interviewed about their working methods and choice of materials in the context of the whole body of their work. The purpose was twofold: assembling essential data for preservation and collection management, as well as developing guidelines for conservation-oriented artist interviews (Beerkens et al., 2012). Following Mancusi-Ungaro's approach, all interviews were filmed. This method was chosen to allow for the creation of original sources that might retain their unique value over time (Beerkens et al., 2012). The first part of the project culminated with the development of an original model for structuring an interview with an artist for conservation purposes, titled Concept Scenario: Artists' Interviews (1999), which refers to interviews understood mainly as oral communication. Despite the fact that this guideline does not offer a precise definition of what the artist interview really is, it was essentially at that moment that the method received its proper name.

The challenge related to the accessibility of the information collected from the artist was also addressed at this time. In 1999 the International Network for the Conservation of Contemporary Art (INCCA) was established, a platform designed to collect, share and preserve knowledge for the conservation of contemporary art.[56] The idea behind the initiative was twofold: to further develop guidelines for interviewing artists, and to build a website to facilitate the exchange of professional information and knowledge about contemporary art conservation.[57] In the first year after its founding, INCCA members, both conservators and curators, conducted around fifty interviews with artists. This experience helped to develop the *INCCA Guide to Good Practice: Artists' Interviews* (2002), which expanded the idea of an interview to nine different types of communication, including letters, questionnaires and phone calls.

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55 Since 2011 the activities of the ICN have been accommodated within the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands (RCE).

56 INCCA, founded by a group of twenty-three individuals from eleven European institutions and organizations, is hosted within the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands (Wharton, 2009). The initiative originated in the previously mentioned Dutch project *Artists' Interviews*, and its first coordinator was Tatja Scholte, one of the PhD candidates within the project *New Strategies in the Conservation of Contemporary Art* (see: p. 20).

57 See: Conservation interviews | Tate. Retrieved from http://www.tate.org.uk/about/projects/interviews-artists/conservation-interviews.

The two Dutch projects described above resulted in a third publication, which to this day is the most complete set of guidelines for interviewing artists, titled *The Artist Interview For Conservation and Presentation of Contemporary Art: Guidelines and Practice* (Beerkens et al., 2012). The artist interview is defined here as a research method meant to illuminate artists' intent in relation to their work process, choice of materials and techniques.[58] The aim of the interview is to collect information that helps understand how materials, appearance, function and presentation affect the meanings of an artwork, and finally how these meanings can be altered by the factor of change (Beerkens et al., 2012, p. 15). The volume understands the interview merely as oral communication, specifying four versions of the method. Central to the book's conception is the most extensive type, the "oeuvre interview", which has been tested in the empirical portion of both of the aforementioned projects. However, the introduction to the categorization acknowledges the fact that in everyday museum practice the "oeuvre" type of interview might not be feasible or effective, and therefore goes on to specify other categories, namely: an interview based on a specific set of artworks (theme interview), a group of artworks from the collection (collection interview) or a specific artwork (case interview). With regard to possible scenarios, the authors allude to the classification used in social sciences and suggest the semi-structured interview as the most efficient method (Beerkens et al., 2012). The book is designed in two parts, where the theoretical hypotheses of the first part are tested in the second by critically reflecting on the resulting interviews in relation to their purpose.

Besides practice-led projects, initiatives, and resulting publications, the artist interview as a research method for the conservation of modern and contemporary art has likewise been addressed in theoretical terms by various scholars, and has been the subject of academic investigation. A significant research project in this area, which this book will refer to at length later on, is that of Vivian van Saaze, in which she tackles the co-constructed character of the interview as a source and points out the diverse interests of the parties involved as a factor that may influence the course of the encounter (van Saaze, 2009c). However, it is important to mention that the field of conservation theory is often fed by practice. Many academics are actually trained

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58   Controversies centred around the possibility of documenting artist intent will be presented in the latter part of this subchapter.

as conservators and therefore ground their writings in empirical experience. This is the case of Sanneke Stigter, who argues that artists' ideas about the perpetuation of their older work are often influenced by challenges they face in their current practice, which must be taken into account when using the interview as a basis for designing conservation strategies (Stigter, 2004, 2009). In recent years the artist interview for conservation purposes has been at the core of several doctoral dissertations, such as that of Ruth del Fresno-Guillem, in which the author explores the potential of the method of preventive conservation (Fresno-Guillem, 2017).

During the last hundred years, the communication between artists and those in charge of caring for their artworks has evolved from the written, one-way transmission of information to an oral method for gathering not only facts but also the relationships between them. This process has been supported by the development of a structured methodology and theoretical framework. The shift from simply 'downloading information' to focusing on how this information is constructed and what it adds to the understanding of the artwork in question bears similarity to the interview as conceptualised in oral history theory, and this resemblance will be explored in detail in the following sections of this chapter.

1.3.3   The Artist's Intent and the Artist Interview

> In the creative act, the artist goes from intention to realization through a chain of totally subjective reactions. His struggle toward the realization is a series of efforts, pains, satisfactions, refusals, decisions, which also cannot and must not be fully self-conscious, at least on the esthetic plane. The result of this struggle is a difference between the intention and its realization, a difference which the artist is not aware of. Consequently, in the chain of reactions accompanying the creative act, a link is missing. This gap which represents the inability of the artist to express fully his intention; this difference between what he intended to realize and did realize, is the personal "art coefficient" contained in the work. (Duchamp, 1957)

The artist interview is often defined as a tool allowing for comprehension of the artist's intent.[59] As already mentioned in the introduction to this book (see: p. 9), although artist intent is one of the key notions of conservation, conservators employ it rather broadly, encompassing everything from the ideas that guided the creation of an artwork to opinions that artists express years later in response to a conservation problem (Wharton, 2015a). According to conservation scholar Paolo Martore, in conservation the term is often used as a "shortcut to solve artwork's identity issue, as well as to establish a single undisputed meaning" (Martore, 2009, p. 2).[60] However, as with so many art-related concepts, the artist's intent is not a rigid notion describing the fixed state of mind of a creator, but rather a concept in permanent flux – a complex, often open-ended process of defining the identity and meanings of an artwork.[61] This brings up the question of whether pursuing this ambiguous, contested term is in fact a suitable objective for the artist interview.

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59   "Artist interviews are conducted to gain in-depth understanding of the artist's intent in relation to his working method and choice of materials, production techniques or preferred media." (Beerkens et al., 2012, p. 15)

60   It is important to mention that this is not always a case. Already in 1996, art historian Ernst van Wetering advocated directly for conservation decision making to have a degree of autonomy from the artist's intentions (van Wetering, 1996).

61   The artist's original intent has been described as a "concept in flux" by Gordon & Hermens, following Lowenthal's earlier characterization of authenticity as "a concept in flux" (Gordon & Hermens, 2013), see: Lowenthal, D. (1995). Managing the Flux of Authenticity. *Proceedings of the Nara Conference on Authenticity in Relation to the World Heritage Convention*, ed. K. E. Larsen. 369-370. Nara, Japan, UNESCO World Heritage Centre and Agency for Cultural Affairs.

The traditionally assumed unequivocalness of artistic intent has been undermined by, among others, Duchamp, who in his famous lecture *The Creative Act* called attention to the gap between intention and realisation (Duchamp, 1957). According to Duchamp, this discrepancy, inherent in any artistic endeavour, prevents art from being exhausted in the moment of its emergence, conferring on it the potential to evolve through interpretation (Wright, 2013). In other words, Duchamp points to the difference between what an artist wants to say through his or her art, which might be partially lost in the process, and what the artwork communicates in spite of the artist's intentions. In consequence, the artist's intent is neither easy to identify nor to record, and following the line of thought of conservation theorist Glenn Wharton, its study should be based on the complex relationships between ideas in artists' minds, diverse influences on their work, and the actual art that they create (Wharton, 2015a).

The ambiguous nature of the concept has led to numerous debates on the validity of artist intent as a reference point for an artwork's interpretation, starting with the influential article by Wimsatt and Beardsley published in 1946, where both scholars argue against it. *The Intentional Fallacy* advocates that in literature, the intention of the author is irrelevant to the understanding of the work, and the text itself should be seen as the primary source of meanings (Beardsley & Wimsatt Jr., 1946). However, this approach cannot be translated directly onto the case of contemporary visual artworks because, as argued in the previous sections of this chapter, an artwork is a multidimensional, complex entity. Its interpretation is highly dependent on the circumstances in which it was created, and artists' choices constitute an important path to follow in the reading process. Therefore, artists' intentions, whether or not they succeed, and although they are difficult to grasp, are not to be ignored. A similar stance is that presented in a seminal article by conservator Steven Dykstra, in which he stresses the importance of the artist's intentions for the method of interpreting the role of the material in relation to conservation decision-making. Dykstra, however, advocates for the abandonment of artist intent as a technologically defined, scientifically doctrinaire idea (Dykstra, 1996), and presents its identification as an interdisciplinary challenge requiring contributions from art historians, critics, philosophers, scientist and conservators.[62]

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62   Various scholars related to the field of conservation of modern and contemporary art have further discussed Dykstra's article in their writings, see e.g.: Hölling, 2017; Scott, 2015; Stigter, 2016; Van Saaze, 2009c; Wharton, 2015a.

An additional level of complexity was added to the notion by Vivian van Saaze, who on the basis of investigating museums' documentation practices demonstrated that the artist's intent is not simply derived from the artist or the artwork, but often 'produced' together with an institution during the installation process (van Saaze, 2013b). In consequence, van Saaze suggests eschewing the concept of the artist's intention as a reference in conservation decision-making, and, instead of assuming a one-way knowledge transfer from artists to museums, to explore forms of 'interaction' in museum practices leading to the production of knowledge that needs to be documented. The shift of focus from comprehending an artist's intent to recording interactions opens up the spectrum of an artwork's documentation to embrace all types of communications produced with the artist or about the artwork in the museum framework.

Umberto Eco, in his seminal book *Open Work* (1989), proposed that contemporary artists purposely leave the interpretation of their work partly open for audiences to complete the creative act. He identifies three different intentions that might guide this interpretation: the intention of the artist, that of the reader (public) and that of the work itself. Taking his approach as a point of departure, and drawing on the discourses presented above, this study builds on the premise that artist intent is to be considered in the interpretative process, and in consequence in conservation and documentation efforts, but cannot be seen as its determining factor.

To summarize, despite the fact that the notion of artist intent as such is beyond the scope of this dissertation, it was necessary to briefly explore the concept early on, as it is commonly employed as one of the guiding purposes of the artist interview.[63] On the basis of the literature presented in this section, I propose that the purpose of the artist interview should not be so much to ascertain artist intent, as to collect artists' accounts of the complex relationships that have shaped their artworks over the course of their career. Further implications of this idea will be explored in detail later on in the conclusions of this subchapter.

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63   Artist intent in contemporary art is the subject of research carried out by Nina Quabeck at the University of Glasgow within the framework of the New Approaches in the Conservation of Contemporary Art (NACCA) research and training network, see: Quabeck, 2019.

1.3.4   The Artist Interview and Oral History: Discrepancies and commonalities

In various texts about the conservation-related artist interview, it is presented as a method akin to oral history, although in none of the writings has this affinity been explored extensively.64 In this section, I explore relationships between oral history theory and methodology and the artist interview, by testing selected concepts related to interviewing against oral history principles and theories. This analysis is based on the assumption that it would be beneficial for both the conceptual and practical dimensions of the artist interview as a part of museum practice to embrace certain concepts and methodologies borrowed from this much older and experienced field.

What is an oral history interview then, and why it is different than the interview format employed as a qualitative research method in fields such as social sciences or ethnography? In short, the oral history interview is a specific type of interview covering a subject of historical interest, conducted by an interviewer who understands the subject with a knowledgeable interviewee. Oral history aims to help filling gaps and discontinuities in historical records by preserving and exposing viewpoints and experiences of individuals, groups and communities who may be underrepresented in published historical research (Wynne, 2009), and by doing so to disrupt established historical paradigms (Boyd & Roque Ramírez, 2012). Oral history interview relies on the memory of an individual and the spoken word, offering the interviewee a space to produce a personal narrative. In contrast to other types of interview, the oral history format does not just provide a means of accessing data, but simultaneously charts these data's significance and interpretative potential, as well as their attached meanings. In other words, oral history pays attention to particular people in order to understand them as subjects in the socio-historical context of the immediate past or the present.

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64   The link between oral history and the artist interview has been brought up, for instance, in the aforementioned book *The Artist interview,* which states that "the interview scenario, as presented further in this book, shows a strong affinity with oral history" (Beerkens et al., 2012, p. 15). See also: Saaze, 2009, p.23. Oral history sources are also a reference in the research and practice of Sanneke Stigter, see: Stigter, 2015, 2016, pp. 92–93.

The guiding principle for a reflection on the intersections between the purpose of the oral history interview and the artist interview might, paradoxically, be the consideration of the apparent discrepancies that emerge in the interviewee's stated intentions. While oral history is interested not only in collecting information but also in gathering and analysing memory narratives, traditionally the artist interview's main goal is the gathering of thoughts, facts and opinions that will inform future decisions. However, if the latter were the only purpose of the interaction with an artist, practitioners from the field would not expand it beyond the plain questionnaire. The artist interview also looks at why and how certain decisions were made, the motivation behind these decisions and the circumstances in which they were taken. In fact, the scope of the artist interview's interest can be nicely summed up with the famous quote by Italian oral historian Alessandro Portelli, who once said that "oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, what they now think they did" (Portelli, 1989). Therefore, we can assume that the aims of the oral history interview and the artist interview are comparable since, besides collecting factual information, both allow for an analysis of how this information was created, and how it is remembered, comprehended and told during the encounter between researcher and respondent.

Similarly to the communication between artists and the keepers of their artworks, oral history as a discipline has experienced a shift from information gathering to understanding the relations between facts and the context of their production. As part of this shift, oral historians have embraced issues surrounding subjectivity (Adler & Leydesdorff, 2013).[65] The latter is an intrinsic part of the interview as a tool for knowledge production, and ought to be recognised as such from the outset. The issue of subjectivity has also been tackled in various texts on the artist interview, both as being produced from a respondent's particular standpoint affected by personal experience, and as a co-constructed endeavour in which the approach of the interviewer highly

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65   In his 2018 article Portelli called this shift a "Copernican revolution". He claims that "From the original perception that for the sake of authenticity and factual reliability oral sources ought to be cleansed of the presence of the interviewer and of the subjectivity of the interviewee, we moved on to the realization that the real, deep meaning of the encounter lies precisely in these apparent impurities, in the staging of a relationship between differences—between different persons, cultures, classes, and times, and between different layers of the narrating and narrated self" (Portelli, 2018, p. 9).

influences the final product.[66] Nowadays, subjectivity is acknowledged as an advantage of the oral history method, and is becoming more and more valued as well in conservation-related research.[67]

Subjectivity as a factor requires that the researcher, as well as the reader, be aware of the fact that the respondent is not only constructing a subjective version of the past in a dialogue with the interviewer, but also drawing upon discourses from the wider culture (Abrams, 2010). This mechanism is also applicable to the interviewer – how she or he designs the interview and the choice of his or her areas of interest. In consequence, memory stories are shaped by these intersubjective relationships brought to the interview. The source constructed in the process of the interview is the result of a three-way dialogue: between the respondent and him or herself, between the interviewer and the respondent, and between the respondent and past and present cultural discourses (Abrams, 2010). This means that the intersubjectivity is three-dimensional, and the third dimension is context-related. For the artist interview, this dimension involves both the context of the creation process and that of the time when the interview is conducted. The challenge for the researcher is to analyse and decode these interrelations, bearing in mind that each one influences the other. It is a difficult process that requires defining each of the factors informing the interview. In the case of the artist interview this influence of 'discourses from the wider culture' is the contextual information that informs the artist's practice; it can be his or her own life story, the socio-political circumstances in which the artwork(s) were created, current debates in the field of art and much more. In her *Theory of Oral History*, historian Lynn Abrams divides this third dimension in terms of two concepts – the idea of the cultural circuit and the concept of composure (Abrams, 2010). The 'cultural circuit' refers to processes that cause individual and collective memories to inform one another. In the artist interview, for example, an artist might espouse as part of his or her own story critiques or interpretations that first appeared in articles or catalogues. 'Composure' refers to the interviewee's adoption of a version of the self as adapted to

66   See e.g.: Stigter, 2009.

67   See e.g.: Beerkens et al., 2012; Cotte, Tse, & Inglis, 2017; Gordon & Hermens, 2013; Stigter, 2012, 2016.

social circumstances, or, more specifically, to the circumstances of the interview. An example of a conscious conversion of this process into an artistic strategy would be the aforementioned creation of the 'artist persona'.[68]

Nevertheless, it is possible to channel certain aspects of subjectivity by applying particular approaches. What Alessandro Portelli called the "positivistic tradition" in oral history seeks to minimise interviewers' interference in the course of the interviews they conduct, and requires them to render themselves 'invisible'. Conservation theory and practice also have their 'positivistic strand' that influences the development of the concept and practical application of the artist interview. This approach calls for a 'minimal intervention' in the creation of the source that will be used in future decision-making.[69] Interestingly, at some point this approach was called into question in both oral history and in conservation, and in both cases the keywords employed in this process were 'conversation' and 'dialogue'. Hammer and Wildavsky emphasise the difference between conversation and interview by pointing out three qualities (Hammer & Wildavsky, 1993). Firstly, the interview is based on well-planned and well-thought-out questions and answers. Secondly, the interviewee is the most important element in this communicative act. Thirdly, the interviewer is not supposed to reveal his or her views, nor to agree or disagree, which could guide the respondent. Yet, in the case of interviewing artists, following this regime does not necessarily benefit the objective of the task. In 2009, Glenn Wharton used the term "guided conversation" to describe a methodological approach to interviewing artists in which the interviewer takes on the role of guide (McCoy, 2009). The term 'conversation' opens up a space for more engaged participation on the part of the interviewer in forming a narrative.

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68   See: p. 40.

69   This issue is tackled by Van Saaze, who observes that in conservation the interview as a format was long perceived as a "one-way, straightforward, value-free tool during which information is simply retrieved from the artist" (van Saaze, 2009c, p. 23). The concept of 'minimal intervention', as mentioned already in the introduction to this study (see: p. 11), is one of the traditional principles of conservation, and is applied mainly to treatments. This principle has recently been contested, especially in relation to contemporary art (see e.g.: Stigter, 2016, p. 78). However, the principle persists in conservation-related activities, such as the artist interview. As Stigter observes, "to keep possible interference at a minimum conservators are trained to keep a low profile while conducting interviews, ask open questions, and keep silent" (Stigter, 2016, p. 93).

Within the framework of oral history, the concept of the 'invisible interviewer' was questioned by, among others, Alessandro Portelli, who asserts that an interview is a form of dialogue, and argues that it is valuable precisely because it facilitates the exchange of perspectives (Portelli, 2018). According to the Italian oral historian, the interview is a "historical and social event that creates a bivocal dialogical linguistic construct and wreaks significant changes both in the narrator and in the interviewee" (Portelli, 2018).

Another aspect that is useful for rethinking the artist interview is embedded in the definition of oral history provided by Abrams, who describes it as "both a research methodology (...) and the result of the research process" (Abrams, 2010, p. 2), and as such embraces within the concept both the process and the product. This issue is also addressed by other oral historians such as Alexander Freund, who states that accessibility to other researchers is what distinguishes oral history from qualitative interviews conducted in other disciplines (Freund, 2009). A similar line of thought is followed by historian Donald A. Ritchie, who states that

> An interview becomes an oral history only when it has been recorded, processed in some way, made available in an archive, library, or other repository, or reproduced in relatively verbatim form for publication. Availability for general research, reinterpretation, and verification defines oral history. By preserving the tapes and transcripts of their interviews, oral historians seek to leave as complete, candid, and reliable a record as possible. (Ritchie, 2003)

The emphasis on the idea of the interview as a stable source is a reaction to the fact that this aspect, although acknowledged and addressed in the conservation literature on the artist interview, is often overlooked in museum practice. For instance, accessibility can prove difficult to balance with the need to protect participants' intellectual property and confidentiality. While outside of the main scope of this dissertation, this topic will be persistently revisited in the course of the book and examined in depth in the last chapter.

This section has demonstrated that the artist interview and the oral history interview have a great deal in common, and these commonalities create a space for the transfer of knowledge and experience. Compared with the field of contemporary art conservation, oral history is an established discipline with a robust tradition, and as such could potentially help develop these aspects of the artist interview, whose theoretical underpinnings and methodological expertise have yet to reach maturity. Oral history theory provides a basis to approach such issues as subjectivity or source accessibility, as well as the arguments in favour of approaching the interview as a conversation or dialogue. Nevertheless, from the perspective of this book, the most significant concept that oral history brings to the table is the difference between collecting facts and collecting stories, and the definition of the artist interview, as tailored for the sake of this study, will take this condition as its starting point.

1.3.5   Institutional Approaches to Interviewing Artists

Nowadays many, if not most, contemporary art institutions regularly interview artists.[70] There are diverse goals behind these undertakings, conservation being just one of them. This section offers a brief overview of the efforts of selected museums and organisations, with the aim of showing different approaches to collecting, storing and sharing artists' utterances from the present moment or the recent past. Some of the examples relate in some way to the present study, while others illustrate general tendencies in the field.

Tate, a national-level institution that holds the largest collection of contemporary art in the UK, interviews artists in several different ways. In contrast to other museums, this practice is explained and presented to the public on the museum website in a relatively

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70   This assumption is based on the study of the content of institutional online platforms and diverse online channels of communications, mainly in the context of English- and Spanish-speaking countries. However, it is important to mention that the information about the practice of interviewing artists is rarely described in detail on the organizations' websites. Therefore, in some cases the account presented is based on other available sources, from journal articles to blog entries. Accordingly, in some instances the identification of the interview purpose is based on assumptions or deduced from the course of an interview itself.

detailed way.[71] Many of the interviews are collection-related and are conducted by curators and conservators in order to gather insights into the future care and display of particular artworks. Others are undertaken in relation to exhibitions, events or research projects. The interviews are audio or video recorded, and some of them are accessible through Tate's website, in a highly edited short form. The magazine *Tate Etc* and online journal *Tate Papers* also publish interviews with artists. Transcripts of these interviews that are not shared online or in print can be obtained through Gallery Records by appointment following a review of the text for confidential material.[72] On the website of the interview project, there is a link to a spreadsheet that lists an impressive 766 interviews with artists and art world figures conducted between 1979 and the beginning of 2015.[73] 239 of these interviews originated from the conservation department. One of the interviews conducted at Tate by a conservator and for conservation purposes will be analysed extensively further on, in Chapter 2 102)

An interesting and exemplary initiative is that of the Washington-based Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. In 2012 the conservation department started its *Artist Interview Program: Capturing the Contemporary* as a preservation-focused and at the same time museum-wide initiative (G. Ryan & O'Banion, 2015). From the outset, the project was oriented towards building relationships with artists represented in the collection, rather than being seen as a one-time opportunity to "nail down an artist's response to a list of questions" (G. Ryan & O'Banion, 2015, p. 14). The program triggered trans-departmental collaborations. For instance, an interview prepared jointly by a conservator and a curator might be conducted as a public talk

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71   See: *Interviews with Artists and Art World Figures*. (2014). Retrieved from https://www.tate. org.uk/about-us/projects/interviews-artists-and-art-world-figures

72   The issue of confidentiality in relation to Tate's archives will be discussed later on (see: Chapter 5, p. 301)

73   The latest interview is dated 19 February 2015. The numbers of interviews per year are as follows: 2014 – 56 interviews; 2013 – 48; 2012 – 58; 2011 – 66; 2010 – 62; 2009 – 64; 2008 – 63; 2007 – 79; 2006 – 15; 2005 – 10; 2004 – 8; 2003 – 9; 2002 – 5; 2001 – 4; between 1979-2000 around 200 interviews were conducted. Interestingly, the interview with Mirosław Bałka analysed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, conducted by Tate's conservator during this very period, is not listed in the document. The list also does not include public talks with artists organized by Tate, and therefore it can be assumed that the overall number of interviews may in fact be much larger. See: *Interviews with Artists and Art World Figures*. (2014). Retrieved from https://www.tate.org.uk/about-us/projects/interviews-artists-and-art-world-figures.

organized by the education department, while the recording could in turn be produced and disseminated by the communications department. However, the Hirshhorn does not work with one particular interview format. Interestingly, despite the fact that film recording is acknowledged as the desired output for interdepartmental usage, Ryan also includes written communication and phone calls under the umbrella term 'interview'.[74]

A cross-disciplinary approach is also a part of the practice of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), which has one of the longest-running artist interview programmes in the field, dating back to the mid-1990s. Interviews with artists whose works form part of the museum's collection are produced by an Interpretative Media team and cover a broad spectrum of subjects related to the respondent's artistic practice (Gangsei, 2015). Interviews are professionally filmed, preferably in the artist's studio. Almost 300 short videos made from the recordings are publicly accessible on the museum website.[75] On top of this continuous practice, in 2014 SFMOMA launched *The Artist Initiative*, a series of collaborative, interdisciplinary research projects aiming at developing models for fostering collaboration between conservators and curators through joint work with artists (Clark & Barger, 2016).[76]

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74   *Artist Interview Program: Capturing the Contemporary* has its own entry on the museum website (see: Artist Interview Program - Hirshhorn Museum. Retrieved from https://hirshhorn. si.edu/explore/about-artist-interview-program/), which currently [as of January 2019] lists 15 interviews conducted between 2013 and 2015. Interviews are not accessible directly but upon request by email.

75   See: *Artist Interviews · SFMOMA*. Retrieved from https://www.sfmoma.org/series/artist-interviews/.

76   The initiative, funded by the W. Mellon Foundation, comprises five research projects that serve the curatorial collecting departments of the museum: Photography, Painting and Sculpture, Media Art, and Architecture and Design. Three of the projects are monographic studies, examining the work of Ellsworth Kelly, Vija Celmins, and Julia Scher in depth, while two more are thematic, exploring modes of displaying digitally-driven design objects, and developing strategies for addressing the problem of colour shift common to photographic prints made with experimental materials during the 1970s and 1980s. The aim of the project is to develop practices that allow for embedding a cross-disciplinary approach to the collections' care beyond the lifetime of the grant (Clark & Barger, 2016).

New York's MoMA follows a slightly different approach than its Californian counterpart. The interviews with artists are produced by separate departments and for various purposes. Between 2011 and 2012, thanks to an anonymous donation, MoMA Archives initiated its *Oral History Program*. The grant covered the management of existing interviews, not only with artists but also with staff, donors and trustees, as well as the production of new ones. The artist section holds 14 interviews that are available online, the older ones in the form of transcripts and the newer ones also as excerpts of video recordings.[77] Artists were interviewed by curators and independent art historians in the museum study centre in the presence of artworks from the collection (Theobalds, 2012), though the conversations were not limited to the works present, covering issues related to the whole set of artworks owned by the institution. For instance, in the case of Edward Ruscha, there are 169 entries in the collection section of the MoMA website, which represents almost the entirety of the artist's oeuvre, and the interview reflects this range. Judging from the fact that the last interview listed on the website was filmed in 2012, the public face of the programme was discontinued once the funding had been spent. This does not mean that MoMA ceased to interview artists, however. There is considerably more material accessible through other media, for instance MoMA's YouTube channel or TuneIn profile, which hosts audio recordings from the *MoMA Talks series*.[78] These interviews, although made for various purposes, mostly in relation to events or exhibitions, also include information about artworks from the collection. Some of it is also highly valuable from a conservation perspective, as will be demonstrated in the following sections of this study.[79]

An outstanding initiative that should be mentioned in the context of the present-day practice of interviewing artists is the US-based organization Voices in Contemporary Art (VoCA).[80] Though not a museum itself, VoCA influences the practices of most of

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77   See: Oral history. Retrieved from https://www.moma.org/research-and-learning/archives/oral-history#artist-oral-history-initiative. In the course of this research I have attempted to access the videos on numerous occasions, but unfortunately the out-dated links are no longer functional.

78   For the MoMA YouTube channel see: https://www.youtube.com/user/MoMAvideos, for TuneIn see: https://tunein.com/radio/MoMA-Talks-Conversations-p411412/?topicId=105239120.

79   See the study on Danh Vo's 'Chandeliers Project' (Chapter 3, p. 179).

80   See: VoCA | Voices in Contemporary Art. Retrieved from http://www.voca.network/mission/.

the large-scale North American institutions by organizing *Artist Interview Workshops* for museum professionals. Besides its educational mission, the organization runs a journal and a series of public programmes called *VoCA Talks*, which feature artists and their collaborators in conversation about challenges inherent in making, showing, and preserving contemporary art. Although conservation oriented, VoCA's approach to interviewing is built on interdisciplinarity and focuses on putting artists at the centre of the discussion about the future of their work. Interestingly, VoCA explores the possibilities offered by the framework of oral history through a collaboration with Richard Cándida Smith, who is well known for his writings on the role of oral history in the documentation of visual and performing art.

This is only a small selection of the few initiatives outlined as specific projects or programmes. Nevertheless, there are a number of art institutions that conduct interviews and publish them online without framing their approach in any particular way.[81] At the same time, there is also a significant body of interviews that are not accessible, including those made particularly for conservation purposes.[82] These diverse practices show how all the threads described in previous sections – interviews with the artist as a genre, the artist interview for conservation purposes and the oral history approach – are intertwined in everyday museum practice. Although not all of the practices will fit within the definition of the artist interview as proposed in the following section, this dissertation aims to demonstrate that all of them are valuable sources for informing decisions related to an artwork's future. As such, they enter the realm of the artwork's documentation, which will be discussed in the next subchapter.

1.3.6   Towards a Definition of the Artist Interview

Drawing on concepts borrowed from oral history theory and the analysis of different experiences from the field, including the author's own experience, the artist interview in contemporary-art conservation-related research is defined in this dissertation as an approach, rather than a tool. It is a compound, process-based method that presents all

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81   See e.g. the Walker Art Center, the Los Angeles County Museum of Arts and many more. A comprehensive list of the diverse institutional initiatives related to interviewing artists can be found in Fresno-Guillem's doctoral dissertation, see: Fresno-Guillem, 2017, pp. 125–138.

82   This issue will be addressed in depth later on, see: Chapter 5, p. 301.

the complexities related to interviewing as seen from the perspective of oral history, as well as to the genre of interviews with artists in the milieu of the art world. The interview as a process implies preparatory research, the encounter(s) with the artist and the post-production (transcript, annotations and analysis) that converts the outcome into a stable source suitable for use in further research. The interview as an encounter is framed as an oral, semi-structured, guided conversation with an artist, where the interviewer plays the role of a guide.[83] In the context of this study, the interview concerning a particular artwork stands in the foreground, due to the way in which museum collections are organised and how the case-study-centred fieldwork has structured the research for this dissertation. The purpose of the artist interview relates directly to characteristics of a contemporary artwork as defined at the beginning of this chapter. As follows, the main aim of this method is to identify and document an artwork's features: its conceptuality, contextuality, processuality and media variability as conceived by the artist. This definition assumes that one cannot gather information on these rather abstract and complex notions by asking direct questions, but rather by gleaning answers from artists' stories, as they discuss the different stages of their involvement in the artwork's biography. Following this line of thinking, the goal of the artist interview is to collect an artist's stories concerning a particular artwork. At the same time, these accounts might be a valuable source of factual data that will prove useful for conservators and historians, such as information about the materials and techniques used to make the art object. Nevertheless, the assemblage of stories for further interpretation prevails as an objective of the interview over the gathering of facts, since the latter should be regarded as filtered through the memory of the respondent.

It is important to clarify that this rather precise but still 'working' definition has been crafted specifically for the purpose of this study, with the intention to test how this 'model interview' might work in contemporary art museums. It does not imply that

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83 The emphasis on the artist is key in this sentence. In both institutional and non-institutional conservation practice, interviews with other participants in the creation of the artwork are often included under the umbrella of the artist interview. This dissertation places interviews with assistants, family members, gallerists, producers etc. outside the scope of the artist interview. This does not mean that the accounts of other parties involved should not be considered important for conservation purposes, but simply that they pertain to a different category.

other interview formats would not be beneficial for decisions regarding an artwork's possible futures. On the contrary, this dissertation encourages the recognition of all the sources produced around an artwork throughout its career as potentially necessary for grasping its identity, and in consequence for ensuring its perpetuation. Based on this premise, in the context of a museum, the artist interview will be considered as a part of the entire body of documentation produced by the institution on a particular artwork from the collection.

1.4 The Artist Interview within the Museum Milieu: Revisiting the notion of documentation

1.4.1 Documenting Art as an Artistic Practice

> In the case of art documentation as an art form [...] it is not "the making of ..." any finished artwork that is documented. Rather, documentation becomes the sole result of art, which is understood as a form of life, a duration, a production of history. (Groys, 2002a)

To establish a firm basis to reflect on the functions and uses of the artist interview within the framework of the museum, this subchapter presents subjects related to the documentation of an artwork as part of an institutional collection – its purpose, shifting roles, structure, and concerns related to the nature of a document. Yet, before entering the institutional realm, the following section offers a general overview of the current condition of the notion of documentation in the contemporary art context. Its starting point is the assumption that since museums are a part of the art world, the general discourses in art history and theory affect how specific, museum-related concepts might be perceived and used by actors from outside the institutions' walls, artists included. It also argues that a familiarity with artistic practices that incorporate the process and grammar of documentation might be key for the interpretation and, in consequence, preservation of contemporary artworks.[84]

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84 This issue was also addressed by conservation scholar Rebecca Gordon, see: Gordon, R. (2015). Documenting performance and performing documentation. On the interplay of documentation and authenticity. *Revista de História da Arte, 4*. Retrieved from http://revistaharte.fcsh.unl.pt/rhaw4/RHAw4.pdf.

Any discussion of artworks' museum records must necessarily address the growing prominence in recent artistic practice of documentation itself as a framework for visual art. This phenomenon, whose origins date back to the first half of the 20th century, can be divided into two categories – the production of documents as a result of art, as Groys frames the issue in the above-cited excerpt, and the exploitation of existing documentation in artistic practice. The first one pertains to the emergence of happenings, actions and events in the 1950s, especially related to radical artistic movements such as Fluxus. The ephemerality of such events impeded their reaching a wide audience, and documentation emerged as one of the means to overcome this problem. The increase in the importance of documentation was also fostered by the rise of conceptual practices, which in the absence of art objects resulted in the production of evidence: from drawings representing an idea to imagery depicting processes and their outcomes. Already in the late 1960s/early 1970s when Lucy Lippard influentially diagnosed a dematerialisation of the art object (Lippard, 1973), the distinction between artwork and documentation had begun to blur, and artists exploited this ambiguity of categories in their own practice in numerous ways.[85] Illustrating this drift is Yves Klein's Leap into the Void (1960) – a photomontage made out of images taken by Harry Shunk that represents a performance which never actually took place. Another prominent example is The Shadow (1981), by French artist Sophie Calle, who asked her mother to hire a private detective to follow her for a day and document her activities. This documentation of a one-day performance – photographs and a textual report – are framed and hung on the wall as an autonomous artwork.

Within the category of documents produced as a result of art, special attention should be given to the documentation of performance art pieces, whose continued existence, due to their very nature, fully relies on documentation. In the past, live performances were considered uncollectable because of their intangible nature. Museums collected instead things related to a performance, such as the material remains or the documentation of the event, but not the performance itself as a live

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85   As Sanneke Stigter aptly observed, in Lippard's text the dematerialisation of the material object does not equal its 'disappearance', but rather acknowledges the importance of the idea over the material product (see: Stigter, 2016, p. 50).

event. This is the case of early performances by Marina Abramović & Ulay, which found their way into museum collections in the form of photographs and video pieces – i.e. documentation.[86] However, since the early 2000s the situation has changed, and museums have started to collect live works by acquiring the means and the rights to re-perform them (Laurenson & van Saaze, 2014). This drift has resulted both from and in extensive research on the theory and practice of performance documentation that arose at the crossroads of studies in visual and performing arts, such as dance and dramaturgy.[87] This area of research has approached theoretical concepts related to documents and documentation in a novel way, and therefore has been highly influential for the development of the argument presented in this dissertation.

The second category is related to the surge of interest in documenting, documentation, and archiving as art practices over the past twenty years. This tendency, diagnosed by Hal Foster as an "Archival Impulse", began to proliferate with the new millennium and took on multifarious shapes (Foster, 2004).[88] Artists began to employ whole archives in order to reveal and dismantle their authoritative function, and this phenomenon is especially interesting in the institutional context, as it generated a critical discourse on the character and role of institutional archives. One of the most radical examples of this drive is Andrea Fraser's installation *Information Room* (1998), where the artist assembled the usually inaccessible archives of the Bern Kunsthalle in the institution's new information room, playing with the archive behind the museum, with its visibility or invisibility, and with the way these two concepts relate to each other (Spieker, 2008).

Little by little, instigated by these tendencies and others, documents have also taken over the realm of art exhibitions. Sometimes documents are introduced by artists as artworks, sometimes by curators to complete the story told with artworks. This process can be traced back to the advent of conceptual art, the curatorial activities of Seth

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86 For instance, while the video from the well-known 1980 performance piece *Rest Energy* by Abramović & Ulay was collected, among others, by Van Abbemuseum Eindhoven and Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, the collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp and Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam holds in their collections polaroid photographs illustrating the event.

87 See the work of Gabriella Giannachi (Giannachi, 2016; Westerman & Giannachi, 2018).

88 See: Foster, H. (2004). An Archival Impulse. *October, 110* (Autumn), 3–22.

Siegelaub and especially the famed J*anuary 5-31, 1969* show in New York City. In this extraordinary exhibition featuring Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, and Lawrence Weiner, the only physical object on display was a publication presenting the participants' concepts and statements on the nature of their practice.[89] Interestingly, in a group exhibition organized the same year in Düsseldorf, Siegelaub presented the work of the same artists in the form of self-interviews to appear in the show's catalogue. In this context not only documentation, but also the interview, constituted an artwork in its own right (Alberro, 2003, p. 163).

All these circumstances place documents and documentation at the centre of contemporary artistic inquiry and strongly influence their general status in the art context. Documents have lost their innocence, their immediate association with veracity, and as such have become ambiguous, potentially deceitful but no less intriguing, and this condition should be taken into account while discussing the notion of documenting as an institutional preservation strategy.

1.4.2 Documentation in a Museum Collection Context and Challenges Related to Documenting 'New Art'

> Museum documentation is concerned with the development and use of information about the objects within a museum collection and the procedures which support the management of the collection. This information should be recorded in written or digital form in a museum documentation system and should be accessible to staff, researchers and the public. (ICOM-CIDOC, 2012, p. 1)

This dissertation argues that in the context of a museum, the artist interview should be studied as a part of the body of documentation of a collected artwork. This assumption requires a brief explanation of how documentation is framed in the museum field. The above-cited definition by the ICOM International Committee for Documentation (CIDOC) offers a rather broad explanation. Yet, based on this premise, in practical terms documentation can be both: a process of gathering and organizing information

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89   For more information of the curatorial practices of Siegelaub and the January 5-31, 1969 exhibition, see: Coelewij, L., & Martinetti, S. (Eds.). (2016). S*iegelaub: Beyond Conceptual Art.* Köln: Walther König.

about a musealium (an artwork in the case of art museums), as well as a set of documents resulting from this process. There are many reasons for documenting artworks from the museum collection. Building on a list developed by Dekker et al., these motives can be identified as follows: publicity and presentation, conservation, development of an aesthetic and/or historical 'framework', or reference and education (Dekker, Wijers, & Van Saaze, 2012).

Expanding on the description offered by conservator and conservation theorist Gunnar Heydenreich (2011), documentation in the museum framework might be defined as a correlation of two categories of activities. The first one is selecting, recording and producing information on an artwork, mainly related to its physical features, meanings and interpretations, history, context, condition and presentation.[90] The second one consists of processes related to the management of this information, for instance organizing, linking, archiving, updating and disseminating (Heydenreich, 2011). The way the documentation of a musealium can be outlined and organized within an art museum varies from institution to institution and depends on a museum's history, subject, scale and structure. Still, there are common approaches, procedures, workflows and standards that should be mentioned in this section, as they will be referred to often in the chapters presenting case studies.[91] In most institutions the operational core and the main reference in structuring the information about the collection is the Collection Management System (CMS), software that offers a database for tracking information related to particular objects.[92] Usually the record of a musealium in the CMS includes all the basic factual data about an artwork, as well as references to other sources of information. However, the CMS usually does not allow for storing and managing graphic and textual documents (Barok, Noordegraaf, & de Vries, 2019), which are therefore frequently placed in the museum archive. The latter is usually not a singular entity, but rather consists of a network of different archives, both analogue and digital.

90   An extensive list of possible types of documents that can be produced around an artwork has been complied on the website of DOCAM (Documentation and Conservation of the Media Arts Heritage), see: *Typology of documents*. (2005). Retrieved from http://www.docam.ca/en/typology-of-documents.html.

91   For more information about the organization of information within an art museum see: Wythe, 2004.

92   Collection Management Systems are the digital successors of traditional paper inventory cards and therefore from the outset have mimicked their structure.

The way the documents are dispersed among these archives varies depending on an institution's departmental structure (Stigter, 2016, p. 18). For instance, photographic documentation might be stored on a specific server, while the textual information about the way an artwork should be displayed might be housed in the records of an exhibition in which it was presented. The history of the artwork's creation written for the purpose of the catalogue might be stored in the archive of the department responsible for publishing, etc. Numerous institutions work with so-called 'object files' that compile essential information related to the artwork, and allow this information to be shared between departments and with the public, mostly by appointment.[93] The organization of the information and documentation strategies in the museums studied here will be presented in the successive case-study chapters. Chapter 5 expands on the notion of museum archive and tackles in depth various related concepts, such as the object file and its accessibility (see: p. 295).

Traditionally, the goal of documentation as a conservation tool focused on describing the object "in the best objective way possible" (Dekker et al., 2012, p. 22), mainly by means of text, numbers and images. Most of the conventional documentation methods consist of different kinds of imaging techniques and measurements and are akin to natural science research. Yet, with the shift in artistic practices in visual arts, the scope and the role of documentation has changed significantly. As Pip Laurenson once claimed, "conservation is no longer focused on intervening to repair an art object; it is now concerned with documentation and determining what change is acceptable and managing those changes" (Laurenson, 2004, para. 5). To ensure the future comprehensibility of the art created in the last decades, documentation has to cover multiple dimensions of the artwork's nature. This might mean documenting its physical appearance; the space, acoustics, light levels, tactility and olfactory effects; and the way one enters and leaves the installation (Laurenson, 2004), but also conceptual characteristics such as function, interactivity, variability and meanings. In other words, as the identity of a contemporary artwork is to a certain extent conveyed through its non-tangible aspects, the importance of documentation as a conservation

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93   Among the institutions within the scope of this study, Tate, MoMA and Centre Pompidou work with this format. More information about object files and issues related to their accessibility is provided in Chapter 5 (p. 295).

method has shifted significantly.[94] Interestingly, within the museum field this shift can be observed even in areas unrelated to art. The nature of many collections has expanded following the recognition of intangible heritage – such as social practices, rituals, or traditional craftsmanship. This means that the material object has in many cases become secondary, while the documentation of processes – collecting included – has come to occupy a central position (Desvallées & Mairesse, 2010). However, these changes have proven problematic for conventional museological documentation systems, especially CMSs, which were originally designed for documenting fixed, stable objects (Barok et al., 2019; Engel & Wharton, 2017; Heydenreich, 2011; Phillips, 2015; van Saaze, 2013b). In the art context this problem can be illustrated with the example of Collection Management Systems, which were developed for traditional art forms such as paintings and sculptures, and normally do not take into consideration complex media installations, software-based art or any other works which are process-based and/or variable in terms of media (Heydenreich, 2011).[95]

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94   The rise in the importance of documentation for conservation in the case of contemporary art has been discussed in numerous articles, e.g. Heydenreich, 2011, Hummelen & Scholte, 2006; Hummelen & Scholte, 2004. Documentation of contemporary art was also the topic of the international conference held in Lisbon in 2013 titled *Performing Documentation in the Conservation of Contemporary Art* (the proceedings from the conference were published in a special issue of R*evista de Historia da Arte*, a journal published by the Instituto de Historia da Arte of Universidade Nova de Lisboa; available online at: http://revistaharte.fcsh. unl.pt/rhaw4/RHAw4.pdf).

Additionally, I would like to invoke here the concept of 'conservation by documentation' used mainly in the conservation of historical monuments and sites, defined by A. Tomaszewski as "the saving of the scientific record of the original state of the monument before it is changed for future generations of investigators", see: Tomaszewski, A. (2002). Environmental Preventive Conservation. In *ICOMOS 13th General Assembly and International Symposium "Strategies for the World's Cultural Heritage. Preservation in a Globalised World: Principles, Practices, Perspectives"* (pp. 264–266). Madrid. Retrieved from http://www.icomos.org/madrid2002/ actas/index.html.

95   Databases for the documentation of contemporary art are the subject of separate research carried out by Dušan Barok at the University of Amsterdam within the framework of the research and training network New Approaches in the Conservation of Contemporary Art (NACCA). On the consequences of the object-based design of the art museum for the perpetuation of contemporary artworks, see Chapter 4.

Vivian van Saaze (2013) has described one interesting case of the incompatibility of a CMS with the needs of contemporary art. In 2003 the Van Abbemuseum acquired a version of the exhibition *No Ghost Just a Shell*, instigated by artists Philippe Parreno and Pierre Huyghe and including work by other artists. However, to be accounted for as an acquisition, it needed to be fragmented into single objects or registered under one entry, which did not comply with the character of the project. This problem was solved by creating special 'work sets' in the museum CMS that created a link between individual pieces, while also making it possible to designate a single inventory number to the project as a whole (Graham, 2014).

In parallel to changes in art itself, both theoretical and technical approaches to documentation have evolved as well. In the first place, the field has, by and large, come to acknowledge the subjectivity of the documentation process as being dependent on the selection criteria of documentalists, as well as other factors.[96] This, in turn, coincided with the accessibility of new technologies for document management, storage and retrieval systems, and later on with the large-scale digitalization of information. As a consequence of these changes, new ways of thinking about the practice of documentation have emerged, resulting in numerous local and international research projects focused on developing new documentation models for contemporary art.[97] It is important to stress at this point that most of these initiatives have focused on certain categories of artworks in relation to their medium or form, predominantly on installations, media art and performance. Although in most cases these models have not been implemented directly in the museum context, they have often served as a basis or inspiration for building institutional strategies for documentation, again principally in relation to the aforementioned 'new' artwork categories.[98] Importantly, all of these models acknowledge the significance of information obtained from the artist, mostly in form of the artist interview.

The notion and organisation of 'artwork-related documentation' in museums that collect contemporary art is neither standardised nor fixed and, moreover, it is currently facing major challenges. As the case-study chapters will demonstrate, these challenges are often related to the traditional structure of the art museum, oriented towards a unique, stable object – a condition incompatible with the changeable nature

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96   See e.g. Stigter, 2015; van Saaze, 2015.

97   Examples of models developed for contemporary art documentation, registration and condition reporting: *The Model for Data Registration and the Model for Condition Registration* (Hummelen & Sillé, 2005); *Variable Media Questionnaire* (Depocas et al., 2003); *Matters in Media Art* model (Documenting Media Art. (2005). Retrieved from http://mattersinmediaart. org/assessing-time-based-media-art.html); DOCAM Documentation Model (DOCAM Documentation Model. (2005). Retrieved from http://www.docam.ca/en/documentation-model.html); I*nside Installations Documentation Model 2IDM* (Scholte & Wharton, 2011); *Documentation Model for Time-Based Media Art* (Phillips, 2015).

98   The *Matters in Media Art* model has been applied at Tate, while the *Documentation Model for Time-Based Media Art* has been developed and implemented at the Guggenheim. Unfortunately, most of these initiatives have depended on short-term private and public funding, and in consequence have been unsustainable in the long run (Dekker et al., 2012).

of contemporary art. Despite the recognition of the importance of the intangible characteristics of contemporary art for its preservation, institutional conservation-oriented documentation is still mainly focused on objects. At the same time, the four features that potentially shape the identity of a contemporary artwork – conceptuality, contextuality, processuality and media-variability – are usually recorded in documents produced and/or collected outside the conservation area, for instance in the curatorial department. These documents are often conceived for purposes other than conservation, which in the museum is understood as the task of conservators, and as such are often not taken into consideration when evaluating an artwork's possible futures. In consequence, the major problem with documenting and therefore preserving contemporary art lies in the lack of interaction between documentation produced expressly for conservation purposes and other kinds of documents that might be essential for an artwork's perpetuation.

The problems with documenting contemporary art for conservation purposes have been addressed in numerous research projects. However, they are usually only tackled in relation to a particular medium/format instead the artwork as a whole, mimicking the object-based structure of the museum. This dissertation approaches these problems differently by proposing a theoretical model which, by redefining the concept of the collected artwork and its documentation, offers solutions for documenting and, in consequence, preserving the changeability of a contemporary artwork across institutional divisions and categories.

1.4.3   The Art Object as Document and Documented: Shifting our perspective on the notion of contemporary artwork documentation

> Increasingly, in art spaces today we are confronted not just with artworks but with art documentation. The latter can also take the form of paintings, drawings, photographs, videos, texts, and installations – that is to say, all the same forms and media in which art is usually presented [...]. (Groys, 2002a, p. 1)

Adopting the perspective applied in the field of performance art studies, this section considers the nature of documentation from the point of view of information sciences, and introduces the notion of the art object as a document, and of documentation as a matrix or network of signs. The latter concept will allow for a reflection on documentation's internal hierarchy, and for re-defining the documentation of contemporary artwork within the museum context. The result of this digression is a proposed theoretical model of artwork-related documentation that will be used throughout this dissertation, on the one hand to help understand why the existing institutional infrastructure is inefficient for the preservation of contemporary art, and on the other to offer possible means of improving its potential.

First of all, it is important to distinguish between document and documentation: while a document is created for a specific purpose and can become part of the documentation on an artwork, documentation is often seen as the process of making documents accessible, therefore making it a secondary concern (Dekker, 2018). Following archival or library science, documentation is the standardized management of documents for long-term access or re-use. Returning to the notion of 'document', traditionally common information storage and retrieval systems have been concerned mostly with text and text-like records (Buckland, 1997). Nevertheless, in France in the late 1920s, museum objects too were included by some documentalists within the definitions of 'document' (Buckland, 1997).[99] Regardless of these two opposing positions, in the mid-20th century, the work of European pioneers of information science such as Paul Otlet

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99   See: Dupuy-Briet, S. (1933). Rapport presenté a la Commission de terminologie. In International Institute for Documentation, XIIe Conference, Rapport, 1933, Bruxelles, pp. 187–192. Brussels: ID., after: Buckland, 1997.

and Suzanne Briet brought other physical forms of 'information' to the discussion. Otlet is known for his observation that documents could be three-dimensional, which enabled the inclusion of sculpture (Buckland, 1997). His view on what a document is comprised objects originally not intended for communication, for instance traces of human activity such as archaeological finds.[100] Briet in her seminal book *What is Documentation?* developed even further the idea of the possible forms a document could take, stating that "the forms that the documentary work assumes are as numerous as the needs from which they are born" (Briet, 2006, p. 36).[101]

Yet Briet's theoretical approach deserves a closer look, because besides allowing objects to be included in the definition of a document, it also provides a vision of documentation as a dynamic network of interrelations and a crucial aspect of knowledge production. The starting point for her definition of a document was the one proposed by the French Union of Documentation Organizations, where documents were classified as "all bases of materially fixed knowledge, and capable of being used for consultation, study, and proof" (Briet, 2006, p. 10). Nevertheless, Briet challenges the traditional, positivist vision of the document "as a proof [evidence] in support of a fact" and expands it to "any concrete or symbolic indexical sign [indice], preserved or recorded toward the ends of representing, of reconstituting, or of proving a physical or intellectual phenomenon" (Briet, 2006, p. 10). According to Briet, a star is not a document, but a photograph of a star is; a stone is not a document, but a stone in a mineralogical collection is; an animal in the wild is not a document, but an animal in a zoo is (Briet, 2006, p. 11). The implication of this categorisation is that documentation should not be viewed as related to a textual record, but understood within a broader notion of access to evidence and context. Is an art object in the museum collection also a document? Following Briet's definition, it might be seen as such. If so, an art object included in the institutional collection would be evidence of the artistic practice

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100   Later on, Roland Barthes, in discussing "the semantics of the object", wrote that objects function as the vehicle of meaning: in other words, the object effectively serves some purpose, but it also serves to communicate information: we might sum this idea up by saying that there is always a meaning which surpasses the object's use (Barthes, 1988, p. 182).

101   The work of Suzanne Briet has been analysed and applied as a theoretical framework in the context of contemporary art documentation by Corina MacDonald, Gabriella Giannachi, Rebbeca Gordon and Annet Dekker; see: Dekker, 2018; Giannachi, 2016; Gordon, 2015; Macdonald, 2009.

of a certain artist, a document of certain tendencies in visual arts of the time, of the institutional collection policy, curatorial choices, and finally the artwork as such. In this light, accession to the museum collection might therefore constitute a shift in an artwork's nature from artwork to artwork/document.[102]

Furthermore, Briet classifies documents as primary, secondary and auxiliary. The second category refers to those that are created from the initial documents and the third to those which are created from the interrelation of documents (Giannachi, 2018). These categories should not be regarded as hierarchical in terms of value, as they merely illustrate ways in which a document can be produced. Briet notes that instances of documentation are contextual, and, rather than delivering the remains of an isolated phenomenon, they form a matrix or a network of signs. Through the juxtaposition, selection, and comparison of documents, a process that for Briet is genuinely creative, the content of documentation becomes 'inter-documentary' (Briet, 2006). This shift away from a traditional static documentary model reflects what Briet considered the essential quality of this new paradigm, which she referred to as "the dynamism of living documentation" (Briet, 2006, p. 41; C. Macdonald, 2009). The assumption that an art object is a primary document and a constructed phenomenon situated within or including networks of secondary and auxiliary documents may allow for a new understanding of documentation in the case of contemporary artworks.

Hence, the concept of documentation as built upon Briet's approach comprises documents/signs that represent the artwork or some aspect of the artwork. It allows for the inclusion of an art object as a document that is equally important as the other elements comprising the artwork. An art object, or various art objects, might constitute the sole primary document, one of many primary documents, or even a secondary or auxiliary document. Documentation understood in this way is a dynamic system of interrelated documents that create knowledge by interacting with each other. To complete the conceptual construct, we should take a closer look at the issue of 'internal hierarchy', i.e. the relationship between the various documents. One helpful

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102   This change in the nature of a collected artefact or artwork at the moment of entering the museum collection is also reflected in the term 'musealisation', as explained in Chapter 4 (see:).

metaphor for the approach I am proposing is the concept of the 'rhizome', borrowed from botany, where it describes a horizontally growing mass of roots capable of sending out roots and shoots from any one of its nodes (as in ginger, bamboo or crabgrass). [103] In the 1980s, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari employed this structure to describe networks of theory and research. Unlike the more common metaphor of the tree (as employed in genealogy or organisational diagrams), where the branches all fan out from a single trunk, the rhizome does not develop out of a single source; rather, it is heterogeneous and multiple, with no beginning, no end and no centre. It has many different entry points, all of which connect back to each other. Moreover, if a rhizome is broken or injured in one location, it will merely form a new line, a new connection that will emerge elsewhere (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Accordingly, rhizomatic artwork-related documentation is open-ended, decentralized and has non-hierarchical multiple entry and exit points.

1.4.4   Towards the Anarchival: From documentation to archive

The concept of artwork-related documentation, which builds on Briet's approach to the notion of documentation, consists of documents in different forms and shapes – textual, sound-based, object-based, visual, verbal, etc. Its structure can be described as rhizomatic because all of the documents included have the potential to become imperative for the artwork's reading, appreciation and perpetuation, and therefore possess a permanent archival value. As we have seen, a contemporary artwork is potentially variable in terms of media, and as such is not tied to any particular materialisation, but rather to the totality of its materialisations over time, with an immanently constructive and processual character. As such, each materialization in turn becomes at once a documentation (Osborne, 2018). As Peter Osborne (2018) argues, this suggests that a contemporary artwork comprises its own documentation and, to the extent that it proliferates and its iterations are collected, even becomes its own archive.

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103   Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari introduced the concept of the rhizome in their seminal book *A Thousand Plateaus*, where they underscore its "principles of connection and heterogeneity": Any point of a rhizome can be connected to any other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order." (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 7)

At the same time, many of the documents that comprise artwork-related documentation live in museum archives – repositories of inactive historical records that are no longer used as originally intended. Interestingly, the value of museum archives has begun to gain recognition only in recent decades. Previously, it was understood that the role of museums was to collect objects according to their subject areas or collecting policies, and to identify, catalogue, preserve, interpret and present them to the public. The staff employed to carry out this work understood that their task was to document the collections of their institution, and recordkeeping was seen as an extension of curatorial activity (Brunskill & Demb, 2012). Consequently, in the museum environment, the focus of the recordkeeping effort was centred almost exclusively on the 'museum object', while museum activities unfolding around the collection were not documented in a structured way.

As late as 1986, John Fleckner, chief archivist at the National Museum of American History, lamented that archivists and museum employees worked in mutual isolation, having their own professional literature, support organisations, and methodology, "even for describing or carrying out similar functions" (Fleckner, 1986, p. 17). As a result of this longstanding lack of communication, until relatively recently museum professionals generally did not recognise the importance of documenting their activities by collecting, maintaining, and making accessible the records of their institutions (Wythe, 2004, p. 3). In consequence, although today museums generally acknowledge the importance of organising and maintaining an archive, a lack of standards has led to a vast array of approaches. In art museums, an archive is not a unique physical space in which ordered records are kept, but rather an abstract concept that embraces the entirety of the knowledge collected and produced within the institution. In fact, the documentation gathered by or produced in a museum is often dispersed among various micro-archives – such as the collection archive, exhibition archive or conservation archive – each of which is governed by different principles (Hölling, 2013, 2018). Within this state of affairs, the museum archive is rarely a stable entity, but rather an umbrella concept that adapts to the specificities of each institutional setting.

These two observations introduce another key concept in the argument presented in this dissertation – one which requires a proper introduction and a critical reflexion: the archive itself. The notion of the archive has been at the centre of discourses of cultural

theorists, observers and practitioners over the last fifty years (Giannachi, 2016). In the postmodern era the archive has undertaken an ontological shift, from a physical repository of documents to a metaphor signifying the means by which historical knowledge and forms of remembrance – whether created by institutions or individuals – are accumulated, stored and recovered (Merewether, 2006).

As literary scholar Ernst van Alpen (2014) observes, contemporary reflection on the archive has been stimulated firstly by Michel Foucault's seminal work *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, which speaks about the role of archives in 'the order of things', and secondly by Jacques Derrida's book *Archive Fever* (1995). In the work of both philosophers, which brought about a so-called 'postmodern turn' in archival science, the archive is first and foremost a construct that helps them to articulate their ideas about human knowledge, thought, memory and power. For Foucault, the archive is not an institution, a material site, or a collection of documents, but rather a system that governs what is said or unsaid, recorded or unrecorded. The 'archaeologist of knowledge' aims to recover and reconstruct the archive, in order to reveal how it shapes our relationship with the past and the construction of historical meaning. Derrida's *Archive Fever* a examines the archival impulse in relation to Freudian psychoanalysis, arguing that psychoanalysis is in fact an archival practice as much as an archaeological excavation of repressed memories. He proposes that humans' compulsion towards archiving is aimed at securing a future that is forever under threat of coming to an end (Agamben, 2006; Merewether, 2006). The critical method of 'deconstruction' that is central to Derrida's approach is premised on the idea that language and text are unstable, and that this instability lies in the repression of alternative meaning that takes place with every statement, since meaning is marked as much by absence as it is by presence (Hardiman, 2009). *Archive Fever* reminds us that "there is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation" (Derrida & Prenowitz, 1995, p. 11). The third voice in this discussion is that of Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben. In response to Foucault, he argues that in light of the phenomenon of testimony, which arose amid catastrophic events such as those of WWII, under certain conditions the relationship between the sayable and the unsayable becomes a relationship "between a possibility and an impossibility of speech" (Agamben, 2006; Merewether, 2006).

By focusing on the speaking subject, he points out the conditions that enable or inhibit speech, which in the context of the archive makes even more evident the fragility of the archive's authority (Merewether, 2006).

The postmodern archival paradigm shift steps away from viewing archival records as static, neutral physical objects or passive products of human or administrative activity. Archivists are no longer passive guardians of an inherited legacy that mechanically accumulates information, but instead are active agents shaping cultural and social memory and identity (Alphen, 2014). This perspective needs to be taken into account as a basis for the development of the argument presented in this dissertation, and for all discussions related to documentation, and, ultimately, to the archive itself (see: Chapter 5).

The archive entails some form of organisation of storage media for purposes extrinsic to the archive itself, and connotes origin and order (Derrida & Prenowitz, 1995). It is a powerful institution whose purpose is to maintain and expand the power of those who established and control it (Zielinski, Giannetti, & Fürlus, 2014). This implies classification, categorisation and authority – terms that are rarely compatible with the liberal and experimental character of contemporary artistic practice, or with the rhizomatic structure of the 'artwork-related documentation'. The contradiction between the traditional principles of the archive and the character of today's art led media theorist Siegfried Zielinski to coin the concept of 'anarchives'. Zielinski states that adding the prefix an- liberates the archive from "the obsessive sense of order and the detailed claim to leadership" (Zielinski et al., 2014, p. 22). 'Anarchives', as a concept, emerged from the logic of multiplicity and variety, which makes them particularly suited to deal with time-based experiences, processes and events (Zielinski et al., 2014). They do not appropriate the truth about the origin of things, and most importantly, about their possible futures. They do not pursue a fixed design, and instead of promoting 'the one and only story' they organise micro-narratives. Zielinski illustrates the idea of anarchives with the disorder of personal archives, for instance those of artists, scholars or curators. For him, an example of the transformation of an anarchive into an archive is the deconstruction of the archive and library of influential curator Harald Szeemann when it was integrated into the Getty Research Institute. What has been termed the 'individual methodology' that Szeemann applied to

develop his exhibitions and artistic objects was significantly altered by its adaptation to the "universal order of a hygienically organized, representative cultural research archive" housed on the Getty Institute's immaculate white shelves (Zielinski, 2015, p. 116; Zielinski et al., 2014). The concept of anarchives might strengthen the potential of the resonating structure of artwork-related documentation by offering the freedom to adjust its organisation according to the needs of a particular artwork.

1.5   Conservation: A working definition

The emergence of the specialisation in contemporary art conservation as outlined in the introduction to this dissertation pushed the boundaries of conservation as a discipline, forcing a broadening of the traditional notion of conservation as an activity. Nevertheless, this change is still in progress, which at this stage might lead to confusion over terminology, especially, but not exclusively, among people from outside the field. To put it simply, 'conservation' itself, a key term for this dissertation, may be understood differently depending on the reader's involvement in recent discourses in the field of contemporary art conservation. Therefore, this section provides a tailor-made definition of conservation shaped in relation to the notion of contemporary art as explained before and grounded in the context of museum practices. Still, it is important to stress that this definition considers conservation not as a field or discipline but an approach that consists of a variety of tasks or activities.

The definitions of the terms 'preservation', 'conservation' and 'restoration' are the subject of on-going debate in the field. They differ according to specialisations within the profession, but also between language families.[104] However, most of the debates are rooted in the same principles: that the conservation profession originated around material culture, and has built up a corpus of knowledge concerning materials, their behaviour, and options for their care (ICCROM, n.d.). The benchmark definition crafted by the Committee for Conservation of the International Council of Museums (ICOM-CC) is also material-oriented and states that the term covers "all measures and actions aimed at safeguarding tangible cultural heritage while ensuring its accessibility

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104   For instance, the French conservateur translates as 'curator' or 'keeper'; French conservators refer to themselves as either *restaurateur* or *conservateur-restaurateur* (Clavir, 2002, p. 3).

to present and future generations. Conservation embraces preventive conservation, remedial conservation and restoration. All measures and actions should respect the significance and the physical properties of the cultural heritage item" (ICOM-CC, 2008, unpaginated).

However, in light of the definition provided in the first section of this chapter (see: p. 36), for contemporary art the material object does not equal the artwork. Moreover, in relation to artworks, objects often have a secondary value and importance, and there are numerous examples of artworks within the scope of visual art lacking any material representation. Therefore, conserving a contemporary artwork (in contrast to conserving an art object) entails numerous activities that do not relate directly to the physical object. One such example is documentation (understood here as a practice), which in the case of contemporary art has turned its focus towards intangible qualities, as explained in previous sections. Another activity that might not be directly related to the physical object is presentation and all related actions. This shift has resulted in the central controversy in the field, illustrated here with an excerpt from an essay by conservation theorist Salvador Muñoz-Viñas:

Ideas cannot be actually treated for conservation or preservation; rather, they can be recorded, registered, enacted, remembered, performed, expressed, etc. There are no scalpels, no consolidates, no lining techniques that can cope with this task. Conservation does help to preserve some particular messages or meanings, but it necessarily does so by treating the material objects that convey those meanings or messages. Conservation needs materials that can be treated for it to work: this is an inherent trait of conservation as it is nowadays understood. In fact, when it comes to preserving pure ideas, there are other professionals who are better prepared for the job – be they historians, reporters, film-makers, archivists, photographers or computer technicians. (Muñoz-Viñas, 2010, p. 16)

Nevertheless, in the case of contemporary art the 'conservation of ideas' is not just a part of the conservation repertoire, but, as advocated in this dissertation, should be one of the main conservation-related activities for institutionally collected contemporary art. As a result, conservation may consist of other actions that Muñoz-Viñas has left out of the conservation toolbox in the above-quoted excerpt. However, his perspective raises

the question of whether the set of activities carried out to safeguard contemporary art can still be called 'conservation'. In other words, should conservation remain a material-oriented discipline, choosing instead a new name for the emerging field of caring for contemporary art? Although I do not aim to address this issue directly, this uncertainty persists between the lines of this dissertation (see, e.g. Chapter 3, p. 188).

Besides the 'conservation of ideas', adjacent fields such as digital preservation or dance have provided contemporary art conservation with other approaches that do not necessarily fit into the traditional notion of conservation. The emergence of forms of artistic expression such as performance art, software-based art or participatory practices has opened up the conservation toolkit to such strategies as migration, emulation, restaging or reinterpretation, which aim to secure the continuation of an artwork's functionality without preserving the actual object (Rinehart & Ippolito, 2014).[105] These strategies are usually bound to a specific kind of art format, such as time-based media or performance; however, following the concept of media-variability, they can be potentially applicable to all contemporary art.

Starting from the assumption that the traditional notion of conservation needs to be expanded in order to ensure the future of contemporary works of art, and building on the former studies conducted in the field, this dissertation uses the term 'conservation' in a specific way. Conservation is understood here as an approach that includes all activities that stem from the methodological recognition of an artwork's identity, are aimed at safeguarding the artwork's continuation, and are performed in an informed, structured and documented manner.[106] This definition is crafted for the purpose of

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105   For the definitions of these terms within the field of digital art preservation, see e.g.: Serexhe, 2013.

106   This expanded notion of conservation is framed for the purpose of institutionally collected contemporary art. This definition was drafted by the author in collaboration with NACCA researcher Tomas Markevicius and presented during the group meeting of the research initiative Revisiting the Decision-Making Model for Contemporary Art Conservation held in June 2018 at the Cologne Institute of Conservation Sciences (Giebeler et al., 2019). This definition has been influenced by the explanation of the term 'conservation' as provided by Sanneke Stigter for the purpose of her research into the conservation of conceptual artworks, which reads: "conservation consists of all activities that guarantee the continuation of an artwork's life in an informed and controlled manner" (Stigter, 2016, p. 26).

contemporary art, with a primary focus on a museum framework. Its general character allows for embracing other conservation-related actions, such as preventive and remedial conservation, as well as restoration as it appears in ICOM-CC's definition of conservation. In the context of this definition two terms – 'conservation' and 'preservation' – can be used interchangeably. To make a distinction I propose to outline the concept of 'preservation' according to its lexical meaning: 'preserving' – to protect, to keep safe, to keep from perishing – and consequently 'preservation' – the fact of being preserved.[107] This expanded notion of conservation is understood as a set of scientific, technical and social activities that are performed by various individuals and groups, including conservation professionals (Avrami, Mason, & de la Torre, 2000). By encompassing the creation of heritage through musealisation, interpretation and education, it is seen as more inclusive than the traditional definition. Following this line of thought, in this book conservation is regarded as an effort of the whole collecting institution that acts on behalf of the communities which it represents.

1.6   Conclusions and Establishment of the Research Question

Parting from the premise that safeguarding the continuity of contemporary artworks continues to pose a challenge for art museums, this dissertation suggests that the structure of today's museums and the notion of conservation that they employ do not match up with the needs of contemporary art. It aims to offer a model that might help bridge this gap while respecting certain foundations of the museum as a concept, especially the central position of the collection. The research follows this intention by looking at the collaboration between museums and artists, with a special focus on the artist interview. It traces uses of the interview in art institutions and reflects on its potential and functions.

This chapter has set the groundwork by defining concepts that will be essential to the argument – 'contemporary art', 'artist interview', 'artwork-related documentation' and 'conservation' – all of which could be understood in several different ways by museum

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107   "preservation, n." and "preserve, v." OED Online. March 2018. Oxford University Press. Retrieved from http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/150719?redirectedFrom=preservation.

professionals. Each definition is set for a different purpose; whereas two are auxiliary ('contemporary art' and 'conservation'), the other two ('artist interview' and 'artwork-related documentation') are hypothetical and meant to be tested or expanded. The first term, 'contemporary art', establishes the object of the study by specifying its features. Applying a broad perspective of the art world and taking as its point of departure the literature from the field of contemporary art conservation, the author's own experiences, and institutional practices described in the literature, the resulting definition sets the stage for the model 'artist interview'. The principal role of this model, thought of not as an epitome of the method but rather an ideal to strive for, is to be tested in the case studies against the day-to-day institutional reality. The third and most complex concept introduced in this chapter is 'artwork-related documentation', which offers the basis for the development of the theoretical model featured in this dissertation, aimed at offering a solution for more efficient care of contemporary artworks in institutional collections. It does not reflect the reality of art museums, but proposes how this reality might be adapted to the needs of contemporary art in accordance with its distinctive characteristics. The definition of 'artwork-related documentation' will be tested, supported and expanded throughout this book by real-life examples drawn from the case studies. Lastly, the need to specify the use of the term 'conservation' is a practical one that originates from my own convictions and experiences. The definition offered here, far from the traditional understanding of the term in the museum field, offers a broader view on the scope of conservation tasks and is in line with my understanding of the nature and requirements of contemporary art.

While the mutual relationship between the four concepts presented above forms a theoretical framework for the development of my argument, two of them are meant to be examined and developed. The pillars of the study are the definition of the artist interview and the conceptualization of the artwork's documentation, both grounded in museum collection-related practices. The artist interview has been outlined here as an approach consisting of the preparatory research, the recorded encounter(s) and the post-production that converts the outcome into a stable source. Its objective is to collect artists' stories concerning a particular artwork from a museum collection. These stories, critical for defining the artwork's identity, have a documentary character, and as such should be considered within a broader context of artwork-related documentation collected, produced and held by an institutional caretaker. The

notion of documentation is defined here as an open set, a dynamic system containing interrelated documents (signs) that represent an artwork. It is the interaction between its particular elements that forms our knowledge of the work. In this context, the art object as evidence of contemporary artistic practice is understood as but one of the documents included in the set, whose organization is based on the Deleuzean trope of the 'rhizome'.

Instituting the two 'model' concepts – the artist interview and documentation – raises questions concerning the relationship between them. While the structure of the model of artwork-related documentation is non-hierarchical and all elements hold equal status, they still may have different functions. Moreover, assuming that the position of the artist in relation to the artwork is privileged, a question arises as to if and how this supposition should be reflected in the content and/or organization of the documentation. What are the functions and uses of the artist interview within the body of documentation of a contemporary artwork in a museum collection? The following empirical portion of the study addresses this question through the analysis of numerous case studies examining day-to-day practices in museums that collect contemporary art.

Chapter 2

Setting the Scene: Meanings, sanctions and properties. Mirosław Bałka and the many institutional approaches to conserving his work

> If we take artworks seriously, and wish truly to grasp their natures, we must attend to the specific details that make each work what it is. As we shall see, these details sometimes include not only the features of the physical objects the artist has presented, but also the features of the surrounding situation in which the artist interacts with curators and institutions and thereby sanctions features of the work. Only by looking carefully at particular, real works can we develop adequate theories of contemporary art and, indeed,
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> of art in general. (Irvin, 2005, p. 316)

2.1   Introduction: Field reconnaissance and survey of practices

2.1.1   Objectives, Methodology, Key Categories and Structure

In addition to the new museums specialising in contemporary art that have emerged over the last several decades, today many of the most venerable art institutions can be found collecting contemporary art as well. Contemporary artworks are kept, exhibited and cared for by institutions that differ substantially in scale, focus, structure, audience, modus operandi, and legal and cultural framework, in addition to how they conceptualise the very notion of contemporaneity. There are 'traditional museums of contemporary art' (Verschooren, 2007) which, according to sociologist Howard S. Becker, by purchasing an artwork give it the "highest kind of institutional approval" available in the contemporary visual art world (Becker, 1982). There are also the 'radical' ones, which are "more experimental, less architecturally determined,

and offering a more politicized engagement with our historical moment" (Bishop, 2013, p. 6). Large-scale museums, such as Tate, host collections that exceed seventy thousand artworks, and receive more than five million visitors each year, while small-scale institutions, like the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, hold only five hundred artworks and lack a permanent venue and storage space. The first step towards the stated aim of this dissertation – to understand why contemporary art continues to challenge art institutions in terms of the broadly understood notion of care – is to study today's museum practices. But how are we to research the day-to-day routines of museums that vary among themselves and defy comparison? This chapter approaches this task by establishing focal points – particular topics that can be analysed and compared – and by indicating the sites of tension that make collecting and caring for contemporary art challenging for institutions. These issues, identified by analysing triangles of mutual relationships between a contemporary artwork, an artist and a museum in three case studies, will guide the further empirical investigation. The gateway to this constellation of relationships is the collaboration between artists and institutions oriented towards securing the perpetuation of collected artworks, and the central tool for this collaboration is the artist interview as defined in the previous chapter.

From a methodological perspective, this chapter employs 'theoretical sampling' as a strategy for theory building within qualitative research. This method is integral to the Grounded Theory approach and allows for the elaboration and refinement of presumed theoretical categories.[108] It entails an overview of assembled data, constructing provisional ideas based on this data, and examining these ideas through further empirical inquiry (Charmaz, 2006, p. 102). By moving back and forth between data collection and data analysis, the theoretical sampling allows one to narrow down

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108   Grounded Theory is a mode of analysis of qualitative research data that represents a way of generating theory on the basis of empirical research. Most GT investigations are been based on field research/participant observation and/or in-depth open-ended interviews (Clarke & Charmaz, 2007) which is equally true of my own research. However, it is necessary to stress that my research neither consistently follows the Grounded Theory approach nor employs many of the other tools developed within this research method (such as coding, memo-writing, saturation and sorting). However, the strategy of theoretical sampling has proved helpful in establishing the theoretical basis for my argumentation as well as designing the second phase of the fieldwork.

the preliminary scope of the research by abandoning or redefining concepts that do not contribute to the main line of argumentation, and discovering new bonds between the other categories. Consequently, three theoretical concepts that are essential in recent discourses in the conservation of contemporary art have been chosen as a guiding framework for crafting the trajectory of the main argument of this dissertation. These three concepts, recognized in the field as possible reference points for conservation decision making, are 'artwork's meanings', 'artist's sanctions' and 'significant properties'.

The first theoretical concept examined in this chapter is 'artwork's meaning', approached from the perspective of conservation. Elaborated in the late 1990s, *The Decision-Making Model for the Conservation and Restoration of Modern and Contemporary Art* (1999), which in the last two decades has become one of the main references for conservators in the field, is based on the assumption that "determining the meaning of the work prior to conservation is the foundation for responsible decision making in the conservation of modern art" ("The Decision-Making Model," 1999, p. 7). The first section of this chapter critically explores the process of establishing the meaning of an artwork, ponders over the challenges posed by this task, and examines if and how collaboration with the artist might help in achieving this goal. It demonstrates the polysemy of the contemporary artwork and the dynamics behind the process of meaning making, and argues that establishing one meaning as a reference is not only challenging but often undesirable.

In her seminal study on how contemporary artworks acquire their shape, philosopher Sherri Irvin presented an alternative theoretical category to the contested concept of artist's intent "construed as a mental state or as behavioral disposition" (Irvin, 2005, p. 315).[109] This category, termed by Irvin as 'artist's sanctions', is the second theoretical concept tackled in this chapter. According to Irvin, artist's sanctions are actions and statements given by an artist at a certain moment in time that fix specific features of a work. These features have a potential to generate interpretations and indicate which possible future states are relevant for the understanding of an artwork (Irvin, 2005). The second subchapter examines the notion of artist's sanctions as a potentially useful

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109   For more about the controversy centred on the issue of artist's intention and its repercussions in the field of art conservation see: Chapter 1, p. 49.

conceptual framework to scrutinize the relationship between artists and their works, looks at how artists sanction their work, and analyses how to relate to these sanctions in conservation decision making.

The third concept, 'significant properties', was introduced into the field of conservation by scholar and practitioner Pip Laurenson as a part of a conceptual framework for the care of time-based media installations (Laurenson, 2006).[110] The term was borrowed from the archive community, which defined it as "characteristics of digital objects that must be preserved over time in order to ensure the continued accessibility, usability, and meaning of the objects, and their capacity to be accepted as evidence of what they purport to record" (Grace, Knight, & Montague, 2009 cited in Laurenson, 2014, p. 76). Laurenson suggests that instead of focusing on the physical entity, which needs to be kept in its authentic state, time-based media artworks can be 'restaged' time and again on the basis of work-defining properties. Following the line of thinking presented in the previous chapter, in contemporary art the medium is of minor importance and therefore from the perspective of this study medium-based classifications are not useful. Accordingly, I assume that Laurenson's term is extendable to all contemporary artworks and I apply it here to an artwork which supposedly does not belong to the category of time-based media art.

Departing from the notions introduced above and using a case-study approach, this chapter explores how the meanings of artworks are constructed, how artists sanction an artwork's shape, how significant properties can be defined, and lastly how a tool for collaboration such as the artist interview can help to document these processes. Therefore, all three concepts are approached from the perspective of collaboration between the artist and the institution, and the artist interview serves both as a guiding theme and as a subject of study. Consequently, the main factor for choosing the case studies presented here is the instance of some form of this collaboration, with a preference for artist interviews that match the prerequisites of the definition proposed

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110   Used also as 'work-defining properties', see: Laurenson, 2006, 2014. Laurenson explains that in the case of time-based media installations, work-defining properties may include "plans and specifications demarcating the parameters of possible change, display equipment, acoustic and aural properties, light levels, the way the public encounters the work and the means by which the time-based media element is played back" (Laurenson, 2006, para. 33).

in Chapter 1. It is important to remark that the descriptions of case studies provided throughout this book go into a level of detail that might seem unusual in a doctoral dissertation, but, as Irvin (2005) aptly notes in the opening quote of this chapter, these details are actually what makes an artwork what it is.[111] All of these three notions allow us to understand 'artwork's identity', where the concept of identity is understood in a similar way as in social anthropology, i.e. as the uniqueness and individuality which makes a person – or in this case an artwork – distinct from others (Szacki, n.d.).[112] In line with the definition presented in Chapter 1, contemporary artworks, just like individuals, inevitably undergo changes during their lifetime. Still, they retain some features that determine what they are, and thus allow us to distinguish them from other artworks.

This chapter considers three early artworks by the Polish artist Mirosław Bałka, each of which is now housed in a different institutional collection. Bałka's works were chosen as a subject of the study according to the six criteria set out in the introduction (see: p. 24), as well as due to the author's familiarity with the artist's practice and the fact that his work had already been examined from a conservation perspective in previous research projects. My own involvement with Bałka's work started early on through my personal fascination with contemporary art, and culminated with the artist interview I conducted in my capacity as conservator at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, which is the starting point for the first part of this chapter. The second case refers to the investigation carried out at the beginning of the 2000s within the framework of INCCA (see: Chapter 1, p. 46), which was used as a foundation for the research

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111   Various complex contemporary artworks have prompted similarly detailed investigations by conservation scholars, e.g. Robyn Slogett on the work of Mike Parr (Sloggett, 1998), Vivian van Saaze's investigation of *No Ghost Just a Shell* by Philippe Parreno and Pierre Huyghe (van Saaze, 2009b, 2013a), or Hanna Hölling's writings on Nam June Paik's works, such as *Arche Noah* (Hölling, 2013, 2018).

112   The notion of artwork's identity is used in this dissertation according to the definition provided in the Introduction (see: p. 15, footnote 10).

I conducted at the Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterlo, described in the second subchapter.[113] The third subchapter scrutinizes the collaboration between Bałka and Tate when documenting and conserving one of his works, which Bałka, in various interviews, described as an exemplary museum approach to his work.

Although the life and work of Mirosław Bałka are not the focus of this dissertation, the analysis of the data related to the discussed artworks requires a deep understanding of his artistic practice in the 1980s and 1990s. Therefore, the subsequent subchapters follow the 'model' of conservation-related research for the detailed study of artists' biographies and their practices.[114] The following section offers a brief introduction to Bałka's oeuvre and the recurrent motifs in his work, with an emphasis on those traits of his practice that comply with the defining elements of contemporary art presented earlier.

2.1.2   Bałka's Artistic Practice

Born in Warsaw in 1958, Mirosław Bałka is considered one of the most important European artists of his generation. He is known mainly for his minimalistic sculptures, installations, and videos referring to history, collective memory and World War II. One of the characteristic features of Bałka's oeuvre is the use of materials, such as soil, ashes, soap and salt, which are filled with powerful symbolic meanings: symbolic in a broader, cultural sense but also in a more intimate way linked to the artist's personal

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113   In 2001 Bałka's oeuvre was selected for a pilot study with the aim of connecting professionals from various institutions with the common goal of sharing knowledge about the attitude of contemporary artists towards the conservation of their works (Hummelen & Scholte, 2004). The project's archive, which is partially available on the INCCA website, includes documentation of various interactions between Bałka and museum professionals, from transcripts of interviews to testimonies of researchers involved in the endeavour. A detailed description of INCCA's 'Bałka Pilot Project' can be found on page 116 of this Chapter (see: footnote 144).

114   One of the key steps of *The Decision-Making Model for Contemporary Art Conservation and Presentation* (Giebeler et al., 2019), the successor of the widely used and referenced *Decision-Making Model for the Conservation and Restoration of Modern and Contemporary Art* (1999) is 'Data Generation' and 'Registration'. This stage entails collecting, generating and registering a variety of different data, including, among others, the acquisition history, bibliography, publications, correspondence, archival documents on the artwork, information on the artist, oral and written information from the artist, his/her assistants, confidants or contemporaries, such as artist interviews etc., and related artworks (Giebeler et al., 2019, p. 6).

experience. Of major importance for the reception of Bałka's works is the context of his hometown Otwock. In the early 1990s, he transformed an old family house into his studio. Since then Bałka often refers in his work to the dimensions of this building and employs particular materials found in it – jute sacks, pine needles collected from Christmas trees, wooden and metal elements, linoleum, etc.[115] These common materials are not only related to a formal reduction but also suggest a desire to communicate messages hidden in the essence of unused, 'dead' things (Sielewicz, 2009). A piece of old linoleum preserves the traces of those who have walked over it, the smell of old-fashioned soap evokes memories of school baths but also horrifying experiments carried out in WWII concentration camps (Czubak, 1998). As Bałka stated in one interview, "for me, the history of materials is more important than the history of art. [...] These are the materials I encounter in my studio, they constitute my personal landscape ... I choose them because they carry a history which I connect with when I touch them. It is like kissing the hand of history" (Blazwick, Lingwood, & Schlieker, 1990, p. 16).

Bałka made his debut in 1985 with his graduation project, *Remembrance of the First Holy Communion*. I would argue that this event is key to understanding and interpreting the strategies the artist employed during the following years of his career. The figurative sculpture, which resembles a self-portrait of the artist as a young boy, was designed to be part of a carefully planned artistic action. Professors assessing his work were taken to an abandoned house in a small village called Żuków, where they were invited to participate in a complex staged ritual of Bałka's transformation into a mature member of the artistic community (Rottenberg, 1994; Sienkiewicz, 2015, para. 3). From a formal perspective, this project was performative in nature and the sculpture can be seen as both a remnant of the event and an autonomous artwork.

There are three important themes in Bałka's early oeuvre: religion, performance and figurativism. Just after graduating, Bałka created a series of figurative sculptures that refer to diverse stories and characters from Christian mythology.[116] *Black Pope,*

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[115]   For more information about the use of materials in Bałka's work, see e.g. Jakubowicz, 2013; Sielewicz, 2009.

[116]   Examples of sculptures created within this context are e.g. *Kain* (1987), *St. Adalbert* (1987), *Angel of St. Adalbert* (1988) and *John 15,6* (1989).

Black Sheep (1986), discussed in the next section, pertains to the artist's youthful struggles with religion, which are key to the reading of his early pieces. Intertwined with his figurative works was his interest in performative practices, evident in Bałka's graduation project. In the second half of the 1980s, the artist was involved in the collective *Neue Bieremiennost'*, well-known in Warsaw's art scene for organizing so-called 'active openings' — actions performed by members of the group engaging with the reality of the country towards the end of the communist period. The story of *After-Easter Show* (1986), a sculpture that resulted from one of these events and currently belongs to Tate, will be discussed in detail in the third section of this chapter. Bałka's focus on figures ended later in the decade. Future developments in his art practice were anticipated by a sculpture from 1987 entitled *When you Wet the Bed* (Czubak, 1998). In it, the human figure is not present but represented by objects — a bed, a prie-dieu and a T-shaped cross built out of a privy door with an Eye-of-Providence triangle replacing the traditional heart-shaped hole. Although Bałka had created nonrepresentational works before, 1990 is acknowledged as the moment when he completely abandoned figurativism.[117] The third artwork discussed in this chapter, 211x179x125, 190x129x73, commissioned in 1993, is rooted in this approach.

While from a formal standpoint many of Bałka's artworks are installations, he prefers to call them 'sculptures'. The artist explains this choice in an interview conducted by art critic Rafał Jakubowicz, stating that although his pieces are strongly related to the notion of space, they are still just 'sculptures in space', not installations:

> I've always though [sic] that the difference between installation and sculpture is that sculpture is not something you throw away after the exhibition has closed. A sculpture has its life and its body. Even if it is just an electric cable - it is this specific electric cable and not any other. The majority of installation artists do not care for preserving their works. You can

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117 A quote from the interview conducted in early 1990s illustrates this shift aptly: "In my early works, I used human body in a very literal way. [...] After a certain time, I fulfilled the hunger of human's body form. I got interested in forms which accompany human body and traces that the body left: bed, coffin, urn." (Jedliński, 1994, p. 64). 1990 also saw Bałka's participation in three exhibitions that shifted his international career: "Good God" in Dziekanka Gallery in Warsaw, Aperto'90 at the XLIV Venice Biennale, and "Possible Worlds: Sculpture from Europe" at the Institute of Contemporary Arts and the Serpentine Gallery in London.

simply take the same materials and recreate the work, make it again. Then it's an installation. Sculpture, for me, is a greater challenge because of the presence of the body. Another body that we create. Which is why I believe those [sic] to be sculpture. (Jakubowicz, 2007, p. 96)[118]

2.1.3   Bałka's (Im)materialities and Conservation-Related Challenges

> It is difficult to define any actual influence as I only recently had information about Beuys. But you could say my branch comes from the same tree. It's a tree which does not forget about its roots, which can be more important than the branches. Beuys showed how important autobiography is for the artist. I feel the same. (Bałka on Beuys, Blazwick et al., 1990 quoted in Benezra, 1993, p. 23)

In terms of the chosen materials, Bałka's artistic practice is embedded in the Beuysian tradition. The parallel can be drawn not only because of the usage of similar raw 'ingredients' but also in terms of the sensibility of their application and the metaphorical language they embody. Today, the oldest collected artwork by Bałka is only 30 years old and the artist is still active, and so anticipating future conservation issues may prove difficult. Therefore, a closer look at discussions on recent challenges related to the conservation of works by Joseph Beuys, one of the most influential artists of the previous generation, could help to foresee dilemmas that caretakers of Bałka's works might face in the decades to come. This section aims at giving the reader an example and a foretaste of complexities related to the conservation of contemporary art and the role of artists' own assertions within this setting.

In their artistic practice, both Beuys and Bałka developed a 'dictionary of materials' in which the definitions are in flux, slightly changing in relation to each particular context, but with a fixed set of personal and cultural associations behind them. One of Beuys's favourite mediums is fat, which the artist employed as a metonym for the human body and metaphor for the human condition (Chametzky, 2010, p. 163). Moreover, the usage of fat is rooted in a widely known legend about the Tatar tribesmen who allegedly saved the artist's life by covering his body in fat and felt after

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118   Original spelling.

his plane crashed at the end of WWII (Tisdall, 1979, pp. 16–17). In Bałka's case, among the various materials I have already mentioned, one of the most significant is soap, which the artist has employed in various sculptures throughout his career.[119] For him, personal associations are related to memories from his childhood, the experience of shame when as a pubescent teenager he had to take a bath in the kitchen away from the prying eyes of his relatives (Czubak, 1998).[120] Still, there are other connotations behind it too, associated with the Holocaust – the lack of soap and hygiene, baths as gas chambers, the supposed production of soap from human fat. Nonetheless, it is important to emphasise that for both Bałka and Beuys, materials do not purport to be anything other than what they actually are – natural matter with all its physical characteristics. Another essential connection between the two artists is a performative aspect in their practices that influences their object-based pieces.

Challenges relating to the conservation of Beuys's sculptures have been widely covered in the scholarly literature (Aben, 1995; Frasco, 2009; Grün, 2007). One of the best-known cases, which may serve as 'inspiration' for the caretakers of Bałka's artworks, is the story of *Felt Suit* (1970) from Tate's collection.[121] Felt was another material that carried a special meaning related to Beuys's personal memories and family history. At the same time, the artist was fascinated by "its industrial, generic look and its stout utilitarianism" (Antonelli & Hoptman, 2000). In 1989, when the artwork was requested for display, conservators discovered that the object was infested with clothes moths and, as a letter to the museum's director describes, "has been eaten away extensively" (Barker & Bracker, 2005, p. 2).[122] Tate's Conservation Department immediately started investigating possible restoration options. It turned out that it was

119   E.g. 2x(270x90x8), Ø 0,8x927, 101x41x12, 3x Ø 12 (1994) from Serralves Museum (iron, felt, soap, steel cable).

120   Czubak, Bozena, *Each boy fears differently*. Interview with Mirosław Bałka, originally published in Magazyn Sztuki, (see: Czubak, 1998) translated into English by Tadeusz Z. Wolanski, retrieved from Barbara Gladstone Gallery archive: http://www.gladstonegallery.com/sites/default/files/magazynsztuki.no19_mar98.pdf.

121   For more information about the artwork see: Hodge, D. (2015). Joseph Beuys: Felt Suit 1970. Retrieved May 20, 2018, from http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/beuys-felt-suit-ar00092.

122   Morphet, R. (1989, February 17). [Letter to Nicolas Serota]. Tate Archive, London quoted after: Barker & Bracker, 2005, p. 2.

impossible to consolidate the damaged fabric since this kind of intervention would cause serious changes to its colour and texture (Barker & Bracker, 2005). According to Beuys, the characteristics of the fabric are crucial to understanding his works properly: "With the greyness of felt I produce anti-image. I evoke a world which is translucent and clear, maybe even transcendental, a very colourful world" (Tisdall, 1987 quoted in Barker & Bracker, 2005, p. 3). After a long debate between stakeholders, including the Tate Board of Trustees and Beuys's widow, it was concluded that the artist would not permit the artwork to be displayed in its current state. Felt Suit was declared a 'total loss' and the institution initiated the procedure of de-accession. Remains of what used to be an artwork were removed from the Tate collection's inventory and transferred to the museum archive.

What clearly differentiates Bałka and Beuys are their attitudes towards the preservation of their artistic production. Hiltrud Schinzel, the conservator most experienced with Beuys's oeuvre, stated that only a careful reading of all the artist's statements could lead to an understanding of his opinion on conservation, even though the conclusion would probably remain only speculative (Barker & Bracker, 2005, p. 1). Nonetheless, based on isolated comments one gets the impression that Beuys assumed that his art would not last forever. In one interview he mentioned that "all conservation is a form of self-comforting and self-deception, since all matter is destined to turn into dust" (Barker & Bracker, 2005, p. 4).[123] What if it had been possible to document Beuys's views on the conservation of Felt Suit when he was still alive? Would such an interview have facilitated the decision-making process described above? Taking into consideration Beuys's sceptical attitude towards any effort to prolong the life of his works, and his often-expressed lack of interest in how museums take care of his work, probably not. In stark contrast, Bałka, as will be shown in the following paragraphs, has frequently stressed his concern for the future of his works and participated in their conservation. The next subchapters consider how this standpoint was embraced by the museums that collected his works and what it means from a conservation perspective.

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123   Christian Scheidemann, unpublished interview with Franz Joseph Van der Grinten, 1993, email to Alison Bracker, 31 October 2004. Quoted after: Barker & Bracker, 2005, p. 4.

2.2   *Black Pope, Black Sheep*

> BAUMAN: And what is the purpose of this oddity?
>
> BAŁKA: This is a space I was working on in the monastery Santo Domingo de Silos in Spain [...].
>
> BAUMAN: Was it a basement?
>
> BAŁKA: Yes.
>
> BAUMAN: Was this Pope sitting there?
>
> BAŁKA: This Pope was sitting there. I placed him in a difficult setting. One had to make a huge effort to reach it. Go down the steep stairs to the vestibule and then enter through a sculpture-wardrobe to the old refectory.
>
> BAUMAN: And what is that goat?
>
> BAŁKA: It's not a goat. It's a black sheep.
>
> BAUMAN: But why black? Why not white?
>
> BAŁKA: The black pope and the black sheep. [...] I took them to New York for the exhibition at the New Museum titled *Ostalgia*. The pope has a mission to accomplish. [...] To remind New Yorkers of the apocalypse. And of something else, that I haven't thought of but maybe they will.
>
> (Bauman, Bałka, & Bojarska, 2013, pp. 98–99)[124]

2.2.1   The Case of the Display Case

Due to the aforementioned shift of focus in conservation from tangible to intangible – related, among other factors, to the emergence of new practices in contemporary art (see: Introduction, p. 15) – investigating the meanings of an artwork has become a significant task within the range of conservation-related practices. Professionals from the field are aware of the need to take different interpretations of an artwork into account when designing conservation strategies and to make an effort to collect available information that can facilitate that task (Marontate, 2013). Moreover, the importance of an artwork's meanings for the conservation decision-making process was emphasised in various publications and resulted in the inclusion of this concept in *The Decision-Making Model for the Conservation and Restoration of Modern and*

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124   Translation from the Polish by the author.

Figure 7. Mirosław Bałka, *Black Pope, Black Sheep*, general view. Photographer: César Delgado Martín. Courtesy Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw.

Figure 8. Mirosław Bałka, *Black Pope, Black Sheep*, the pope figure. Photographer: César Delgado Martín. Courtesy Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw.

Contemporary Art (1997). The discrepancy between 'condition' and 'meaning' serves there as a point of departure for designing conservation-related interventions. Although *The Decision-Making Model* persistently uses the singular 'meaning' as a reference, it acknowledges its layered and ambiguous character. It also claims that the authority to determine the meaning of an artwork for conservation purposes belongs to the "curator/conservator". Nevertheless, as I will demonstrate in this section, it is not only difficult to identify the potential meanings of a contemporary artwork, but also problematic to determine which of these meanings should be used as 'the reference'. Moreover, 'artwork's meaning' is not a stable concept – artworks take on meanings throughout their whole trajectory (van de Vall et al., 2011), and this process often results in a physical modification (alteration, adjustment) of the art object. Following this line of inquiry, this case study demonstrates the polysemy of contemporary artwork, how the meanings are shaped and how tools for collaboration such as the artist interview help

to identify them, and at the same time foster the rise of new ones. The case study draws on my experiences as a museum conservator experimenting with new approaches to developing a sustainable conservation strategy for contemporary works of art.

In spring 2013 the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw (MSN), where I was then working as a conservator, decided to acquire one of the few early works by Mirosław Bałka still available for sale. The sculpture, entitled Black Pope, Black Sheep (1986) was still owned by the artist and was, at the time, continuously travelling between exhibitions. Before the formal acquisition, the piece was to be shown in the Arsenale part of the Aperto exhibition at the upcoming Venice Art Biennale. However, as the sculpture was to be shipped from Italy directly to the museum storage, the institution was interested in monitoring the conditions of the loan and helping the artist with the logistics. The complexity of the situation and the conflicting interests of all parties involved are well reflected in the email correspondence between the museum's Head of Collections, the curator of the show, and the artist.[125]

Head of Collections to exhibition curator:

> [...] I am writing on behalf of Mirosław with regards to the loan of the Black Pope to Biennale dI Venezia. Since the work will enter our collection after the termination of the exhibition in Venice it has been recently transported by Mirosław to our premises in order to estimate its condition and help Mirosław to fill out the technical form. With regards to this I would be grateful if you could send us the humidity and temperature data for the Arsenale during May–November period.

Exhibition curator to Head of Collections:

> [...] I am glad to know the piece will eventually enter the museum collection at the end of the presentation in Venice. As Mirosław Bałka probably knows, the spaces of the Arsenale have no climate and temperature control. So

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we dont [sic] have data to give you or share about the climate conditions. [...] I hope we can move ahead with the loan as agreed. Please let me know if you want me to ask Mirosław's opinion about this. I am sure you and the Museum [...] understand the importance of the inclusion of this piece in the biennale.

Head of Collections to Mirosław Bałka:

Dear Mirosław, I just received this email [...] about the climate conditions, or rather the lack of climate conditions, in the Arsenale. This reply confirms that the display case will be indispensable. Please let me know how we should proceed. The condition report will be ready by Friday.

In my role as conservator, I assumed, since the sculpture was still owned by Bałka and the museum was not directly involved in negotiating the conditions of the loan, that the display case mentioned in the last email was the requirement of the artist himself. Moreover, the choice of cheap materials – Plexiglas and MDF – susceptible to scratches and other kinds of damage, pointed to the temporary character of the protective device. Together with the artist we drew up precise instructions on how the work should be positioned inside the vitrine, and the artwork, together with the display case, was shipped to Italy.

At the end of 2013, months after the Venice show was over, *Black Pope, Black Sheep* was to be included in a temporary exhibition presenting recent MSN acquisitions.[126] To my surprise, the curator informed me that the sculpture would again be exhibited inside the Plexiglas display case. This was unusual because whereas it is normally the conservator – in this case me – who calls for extra protection of vulnerable objects, I myself found the vitrine unnecessary. Moreover, at MSN accessibility is highly valued and separating artworks from the audience with vitrines is a contested practice that usually elicits strong objections from the curatorial team. The vitrine for the Arsenale was originally produced by request of the artist, who was concerned about the security of the piece and possible damage caused by the Venetian humidity. From

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126   Exhibition *In The Near Future* (February-August 2014), Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw.
       See: http://artmuseum.pl/en/wystawy/w-niedalekiej-przyszlosci.

a conservation perspective the first argument was not convincing even in the context of the Arsenale, as the display case was neither sealed nor climate-controlled. But even so, this motivation was less applicable still in the context of the new show in Warsaw. Furthermore, the institution was by then the artwork's legal caretaker, and as such was entitled to decide how to protect it. As I eventually found out, presenting the sculpture in the vitrine during the show at MSN was actually the artist's wish, and the institution decided to comply with his request. Nevertheless, the reason behind this demand remained unknown.

In 2015, MSN staff began to work on a new initiative – the Collection Documentation Programme. The aim of the project was to investigate, collect, and share details concerning the provenance, exhibition history, and past receptions of works from the museum's collection. Interviews conducted with artists were to be a central aspect of the project. Due to the previous positive experiences of working with Mirosław Bałka, his involvement in the museum, and his interest in the institutional life of his artworks, *Black Pope, Black Sheep* was chosen for a pilot study.[127] This decision, besides complying with the objectives of the project, provided an opportunity to address the issue of the display case. Why did Bałka decide to show the sculpture again in the vitrine? Is the sculpture now meant to be accompanied by the display case in all future exhibitions? And if so, should the museum consider the display case as an integral part of the sculpture and include it in the museum inventory as such?

This set of questions, addressing conservation problems, coincides with the research questions that guided the investigation presented in this subchapter. The study entailed three phases described in consecutive sections: the first one scrutinizes the history of the piece, the second one analyses the outcome of the artist interview, and the last one presents the analysis of the findings.

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127   Mirosław Bałka is a member of the Museum Board, see: http://artmuseum.pl/en/muzeum/rada.

2.2.2   Understanding the Artwork

Black Pope, Black Sheep is a sculpture consisting of two life-size figures — a pope, sitting on a chair hidden beneath his robes, and a sheep (Figure 7). The pope's figure, as well as the mitre, was formed from scraps of a stiff carpet painted with bitumen paint and stitched together by hand. Its back is decorated with irregular, bicolour, geometrical ornamentation (Figure 8). Solid, longitudinal tusk-like elements made of metal rods resemble streams of tears falling from the figure's eyes. There is a stiff structure in the form of the Greek letter ϖ attached to the front of the sculpture. The large head tucked between narrow shoulders and the figure's feet, which do not reach the ground, both shaped in a black textile, make the character look old, fragile and vulnerable, in contrast to his companion, the sheep, which is lively, energetic and sensual. The animal is formed with fabric that was stiffened with a thick layer of black bitumen paint mixed with fine sand. There are numerous U-shaped metal needles attached to its back giving it a bristled and aggressive look. Both of the figures' mouths have a strong, scarlet colour and dominate within the mass of black, matte textile.

On the MSN collection's website the artwork is described as follows:

> *Black Pope, Black Sheep* is one of the most important pieces from the early stage of the artist's career. [...] The artist has made a reference to the prophecies of Nostradamus, as well as to urban legends, visions, and apocalyptic predictions about the election of a Black Pope to the Holy See, which is to mark the end of the world. The work expresses the spirit of the latter half of the 1980's: a time of anxiety, tensions, but also trust in the approaching breakthrough which was to shake the foundations of the world [...]. ("Mirosław Bałka: Black Pope, Black Sheep," n.d., para. 1)

This short explanation, the first and most complete information that comes up when searching the Internet, became a starting point for identifying the artwork's meanings and meaning-making factors, both inherent and external. Following the above-quoted description, the research started with the overview of the historical context of the artwork's creation. The 1980s was indeed a unique period in Polish history. It witnessed the rise and fall of the Solidarity movement and the subsequent proclamation of martial law by the communist government – events that had a great

influence on the wider social mood and strongly affected the development of the artistic milieu. Artists started to pose questions about the place of art in the current context, its relation with the authorities and their moral responsibility in the face of political oppression (Jarecka, 2011). These concerns formed the basis for the birth of alternative artistic groups that were independent from state institutions and thus also from censorship. One of these groups developed around shows co-organized under the auspices of the Catholic Church, the main ally of the underground opposition. Exhibitions took place in parish buildings and mostly presented national-patriotic trends. The influence of this movement on the artistic life of the time was so important that it became a synonym for the art of the decade (Jarecka, 2011). However, besides the art scene authorised by the government and these 'parish exhibitions' there was also a third circle, the so-called 'young art' or New Expression.[128] It was clustered around art schools and distanced itself from both the authorities and the Church. In this hopeless, suffocating atmosphere, without a clear vision of their future, young artists began to openly mock the state propaganda, the 'official' cultural world, the mass media, the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, and the hypocrisy of Polish morality (Woliński, n.d.). Bałka's early works are strongly rooted in this context.

In most descriptions of Black Pope, Black Sheep the interpretation of the figure of the black pope relates to the Nostradamus prophecies.[129] There are, however, other historical meanings related to the motif of the 'black pope' that are less present in the

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128 The artistic phenomenon known as New Expression [Nowa ekspresja] evolved in Poland in the early 80s, during the birth of the Solidarity movement and the years of martial law, reached its peak between 1986 and 1987 and ended in 1989. In formal terms, it was equivalent to Neo-expressionism, which in Italy was called *La Transavanguardia*, in Germany *Neue Wilde* and in France *Figuration Libre*. See: Stanisławski K. [eds]. Apogeum - nowa ekspresja 1987, Toruń: Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej "Znaki Czasu", 2010

129 See e.g. Kuc M., *Startuje 55 Biennale Sztuki w Wenecji*, Rzeczpospolita, 30.05.2013. Retrieved April, 2, 2018, from: http://www.rp.pl/artykul/1014713-Startuje-55-Biennale-Sztuki-w-Wenecji.html#ap-1

   However, the idea of there being a 'black pope' at the end of times first came from the Prophecy of the Popes attributed to St. Malachy – a series of 112 short, cryptic phrases in Latin which purport to predict the lineage of Roman Catholic popes (along with a few antipopes), beginning with Pope Celestine II. The alleged prophecies were first published by Benedictine monk Arnold Wion in 1595 and were attributed to Saint Malachy, a 12th-century Archbishop of Armagh, Ireland (Laineste & Brzozowska, 2014).

Figure 9. Mirosław Bałka, *Black Pope, Black Sheep*. Installation view of the exhibition *CTRL* organized by Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (MNCARS) in monastery Santo Domingo de Silos. Source: MNCARS press materials. Retrieved from: https://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/exhibitions/miroslaw-balka-ctrl.

popular imagination. The term is also used in relation to the General of the Jesuits, due to the power connected to the position and his black vestments, contrasting with the white robes of the Pontiff. It is also a nickname for Anton LaVey, the legendary founder of the large US-based Church of Satan.[130] Nevertheless, the key figure for understanding the social context in which *Black Pope, Black Sheep* was created is Karol Wojtyła, the 'Polish Pope'. Since his election to the Holy See in 1978 until the fall of the Iron Curtain, he was the only common moral authority in Polish society, respected by both parties – people related to the regime and the opposition. There was unwritten social agreement that John Paul II was a person who should not be questioned or criticized. In this context, Bałka's sculpture portraying the Pope as weak, old and 'mummified' might be seen as controversial.

Throughout history representations of the enthroned pope have symbolized papal infallibility, one of the dogmas of the Catholic Church. In Renaissance and baroque tombs of popes their sculpted figures epitomise their power and glory. The best

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130 Active from the 1960s to 90s in the US. See: Faxneld, P., & Petersen, J. A. (2013). *The Black Pope and the Church of Satan*. The Devil's party: Satanism in modernity. New York: Oxford University Press. pp. 79–82

Figure 10. Mirosław Bałka, *Black Pope, Black Sheep*. Installation view of the exhibition *CTRL* organized by Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (MNCARS) in monastery Santo Domingo de Silos. Source: MNCARS press materials. Retrieved from: https://www. museoreinasofia.es/en/exhibitions/miroslaw-balka-ctrl.

example in painting is *Innocent X* by Velázquez, significant not only for being considered as the finest portrait ever created, but also for its later repercussions. From 1950 to 1963 Francis Bacon painted more than forty-five studies after the Velázquez painting in which he "divests the papal image of its power and authority" (Arya, 2009, p. 40). Both Bacon and Bałka entered in a dialogue with the tradition of immortalizing and eternalizing the figure of the pontiff. Both interpretations are located within the context of death, although in the case of Bacon's first and best-known portrait from the series death is represented in a sudden, explosive event manifested as a scream, while Bałka's pope is a silent witness to death, mummified by the passage of time. Popes' mummified bodies are a reality in the Catholic tradition, where the incorruptibility of a mortal body is a sign of its holiness. In Roman churches corpses of popes are publicly displayed for the purpose of adoration and prayer. Within the framework of the Christian tradition, Bałka's pope likewise alludes to the archetype of the Good Shepherd, a title of Christ and the model for a bishop's pastoral office.[131] His flock consists of just one animal, which is as black as the shepherd himself. In European

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131   See: *Catechism of the Catholic Church.* (1994). N. 896. Retrieved from http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM

Figure 11. Mirosław Bałka, *Black Pope, Black Sheep*. Installation view of the exhibition *The Encyclopedic Palace* in Arsenale (the 55th Venice Biennale). Retrieved from: https://www.labiennale.org/en/il-palazzo-enciclopedico.

culture, a black sheep typically alludes to a member of a group who stands out, rooted in the belief that black sheep were less valuable than white ones because it was more difficult to dye their wool.[132]

The investigation of changing interpretations of the artwork throughout consecutive exhibitions demonstrates that it is not just the sculpture itself that generates meaning, but that it can acquire new ones through the context of its display. In 2010, after almost 20 years of storage in a cubbyhole in Bałka's workshop, *Black Pope, Black Sheep* was presented in a solo show of the artist's work organized by the Reina Sofía Museum at the Abbey of Santo Domingo de Silos, in the middle of rural Castile, Spain.[133] For the purpose of this show, Bałka re-contextualised the sculpture by making it a part of a larger narrative, built around the notion of a rite of passage. To access the exhibition visitors had to descend to the Abbey cellar, and the entrance to the main gallery was

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132   See: 'black sheep' definition in Ammer, C. (2014). *The American Heritage dictionary of idioms.*

133   The exhibition, organized by Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (MNCARS) and curated by Lynne Cooke, was entitled *ctrl* (November 2010 - April 2011). For more details about the show, see: https://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/exhibitions/miroslaw-balka-ctrl

Figure 12. Mirosław Bałka, *Black Pope, Black Sheep*. Installation view of the exhibition *Rainbow in the Dark* at the Malmö Konstmuseum. Source: Magazyn Szum. Retrieved from: https://magazynszum.pl/rainbow-in-the-dark-w-malmo-konstmuseum/. Photographer: unknown.

blocked by the rear of a huge wardrobe. In front of it, at eye level, there was a triangular handle hanging from the ceiling, clearly meant to be a device that grants access to the exhibit beyond. After pushing one of the wardrobe's doors visitors found themselves in a dark barrel-vaulted chamber. At the far end, emerging from the darkness and accentuated by spotlighting, appeared the sculpture atop a low grey pedestal, as if suspended in the air (Figure 9-10). In the context of the dimly lit stone vault it looked like it had always been a part of this dramatic setting.[134] Another level of meaning is added by the title of the exhibition – the abbreviation 'ctrl', as it appears on a computer keyboard. In the context of the narrative presented in the Abbey, one could think about the control of the common historical memory and individual experiences on the perception of things. Or the control of the artist over the public's feeling or emotions. Clearly, the historical context of the sculpture's creation was less important in this setting, as meanings related to death and the 'dark mysteries' of Christianity gained priority.

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[134]   For Bałka, the wardrobe entrance alluded to the furniture used by Anne Frank's family as a hiding place in Nazi-occupied Amsterdam during World War II. The description of the exhibition, and ideas on possible interpretations, are based on the catalogue text (see: Cooke, 2011).

In the next major exhibition, entitled Ostalgia, held at the New Museum in New York, the contextualization of the sculpture was entirely different.[135] *Black Pope, Black Sheep* was presented there alongside other artworks from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Republics in the context of their dialogue with the former political system. As the press note on the museum website indicates, the exhibition title referred to the German word 'ostalgie', "a term that emerged in the 1990s to describe a sense of longing and nostalgia for the era before the collapse of the Communist Bloc" (New Museum, 2011, p. 1). This time, the historical context of the artwork's creation was foregrounded, positioning the artwork squarely within the exhibition's narrative. Interestingly, in the press release the complex background of the artwork's creation was reduced to the short description, "uncanny reinterpretation of religious sculpture" (New Museum, 2011, p. 1).

The next exhibition was the *Aperto* of the 55th Venice Biennale, for which the display case was designed. Bałka's sculpture was a part of the show entitled *The Encyclopedic Palace* within the section curated by artist Cindy Sherman, who created her own imaginary museum, a kind of "anatomical theatre in which to contemplate the role of images in the representation and perception of the self" (Gioni, 2013). It contained a collection of representations of bodies and faces where ethnographical objects, votive offerings, puppets, and dolls were shown together with sculptures, photographs and paintings. *Black Pope, Black Sheep,* 'museologized' by the vitrine (Figure 11), fit perfectly within the general aesthetics of the show, full of odd figures shielded behind protective glass.

As can be seen, already at this stage of the preliminary research the task to "determine the meaning of the work" following the guidelines established in *The Decision-Making Model for the Conservation and Restoration of Modern and Contemporary Art* (1997) had turned out to be a complex undertaking. Still, I assumed that a comparison between the gathered information and the artist's own view might point in the 'right' direction and help to establish a reference for future conservation decision making, in this particular case for determining if the display case should become an integral part of the piece.

135　Exhibition *Ostalgia,* New Museum NY; July–September 2011, curated by Massimiliano Gioni, see: http://www.newmuseum.org/exhibitions/view/ostalgia.

2.2.3   The Artist's Voice: Memories and meanings in flux

The artist interview, designed in close collaboration with the MSN assistant collections curator, was conducted by the author in the presence of the sculpture and was recorded on video. The questions' point of departure was the information collected during the preliminary research. The conversation lasted more than two hours and resulted in a trove of valuable information. Following the conservation problem as defined before, this section will present the analysis of portions of this conversation that add to the understanding of the role of the display case in the sculpture's story, and provide more contextual information that can influence the decision-making process regarding the artwork's possible futures.

The conversation addressed the issue of the display case directly:

> AW: We met on the occasion of preparations for exhibiting the sculpture at the Venice Biennale. Due to the specificity of the Arsenale venue – potential risks related to the unstable microclimate and the crowd of visitors – you decided back then to protect the *Black Pope, Black Sheep* with a display case. Since then, the sculpture has been accompanied by the vitrine at each subsequent exhibition. Why?

> MB: When this work was created, in 1987, it did not contain any additional element. The question about a possible addition of a small pedestal came up during the exhibition in the Abbey of Santo Domingo de Silos. Back then I thought that a new historical perspective emerged and that the pedestal would distance the viewers from the piece [AW: in terms of historical distance]. The sculpture was presented on a similar pedestal in the New Museum. On the occasion of the Venice show, there arose a necessity for additional protection of the piece. However, besides solving practical problems related to the security of the work, the display case added new layers of meanings. It opened a drawer full of popes in glass vitrines displayed in Italian churches. It triggered memories related to the 'popemobile' in which John Paul II used to travel during his Pastoral Visits. I think that since then the display case became a part of the piece naturally. In this context, the pope seems to be more 'mummified'. I accepted the

display case artistically and I can't imagine displaying the sculpture without protection. [...] The only thing I would change is to replace Plexiglas with glass, which is a more noble material.

AW: What about the pedestal? [...] Do you think that its colour should always remain the same, or rather adapted to the architecture of each particular show?

MB: The colour had already been chosen. However now, when there is more time to think, I would consider remaking the pedestal from evenly cast, grey concrete while keeping the same measurements [...]. *The Black Pope* relates to stable sculptures, stable vitrines. Yet, there are other types of [AW: pope] sculptures, for instance, processional sculptures from Holy Week, Semana Santa in Spain. Sculptures with a religious character, which are built lighter on purpose so that they can travel along the streets of Spanish cities. But in this case, I think, the grey concrete pedestal and the glass vitrine would be the right thing to do. (M. Bałka, in-person interview, July 27, 2015)

The quote presented above shows that Bałka is not only aware of the changeability of his work but is also interested in creatively exploring its potential. The story of the display case and the development of possible meanings it implies is presented here in a linear way. The first phrase suggests that the sculpture was designed to stand directly on the floor, and meant to be perceived by the viewers as a part of the 'reality' in which they themselves function. In the Spanish show, the artist wanted to create a distance from the meanings that the piece had previously expressed, which he achieved by adding the pedestal. That, together with the entire presentation setting, changed the relationship between the public and the piece: the figures seemed to pertain to another reality – whether historical or created by the artist. The addition of the display case followed the same logic – the sculpture in the vitrine is immediately perceived as something not only distant in terms of time and space but also as something significant and valuable, something to be treasured.

This linear narrative was challenged by a photograph found during additional research carried out for the purpose of this book several months after the interview. It was taken during the very first presentation of *Black Pope, Black Sheep,* a year after the artwork's

Figure 13. Mirosław Bałka, *Black Pope, Black Sheep*. Installation view of the exhibition *And Now It's Time for Sculpture* [*A teraz rzeźba*], Polish Architects Association's [SARP] pavilion, Warsaw 1988. Photographer: unknown. Courtesy Museum of Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw.

creation.[136] The image was taken from behind the sculpture and shows the pope and the sheep placed on whitewashed wooden boards that might resemble platforms used for carrying figures of saints during religious processions (Figure 13). The artist seems to have forgotten this additional element and did not mention it during the interview. Evidently, twenty years later, for the purpose of the Spanish show Bałka re-interpreted the sculpture in line with his more recent concerns.[137]

Although the excerpt from the interview suggests that for Bałka the artist's role in assigning meanings to the artwork is of minor importance, he often actively suggests interpretative paths for his sculptures. In the interview, by using the passive voice and referring to the display case as a subject instead of an object, Bałka seems to distance himself from the process of meaning making. The pedestal and the display case, both added on his request, generated meanings and his role was only to accept them 'artistically'. At the same time, Bałka seems interested in building and controlling narratives around his works. While studying the curatorial interpretations of the sculpture I searched for the first mention of the Nostradamus prophecy as a key to the reading of the work. Finally, it turned out to have been

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136   The exhibition *And now it's time for sculpture* [*A teraz rzeźba*], curated by Andrzej Bonarski, was held in the Polish Architects Association's [SARP] pavilion in Foksal street in Warsaw in 1988. The photograph was found in the archive of the Museum of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw.

137   After the discovery I showed the photograph to Bałka. He acknowledged that this image jogged his memory, and recalled that the boards, originally used for shuttering, were not whitewashed but covered by leftover mortar. He also mentioned that the boards were used later as a part of *Oasis (C.D.F.)* (1989), currently in the collection of Tate. Bałka, M. (October 19, 2016). [Email to Agnieszka Wielocha]. Author's private archive.

the artist's own hint.[138] Another example of Bałka influencing the meaning-making processes is a story recounted in an article by art critic Karol Sienkiewicz (2013), which describes the circumstances surrounding the production of the catalogue for *How it is*, Bałka's celebrated exhibition in Tate's Turbine Hall. According to Sienkiewicz, the contributing authors received from the artist beforehand a handwritten list of cultural associations related to the project.[139] The entries included diverse concepts ranging from the artist's own basement to Noah's Ark, Jonah inside the whale, or even a black dildo (Sienkiewicz, 2013).

As the section describing the outcomes of the preliminary research demonstrates, there is another group of meanings that are generated without the artist's direct involvement and beyond his control, and which are dependent on the ever-changing social, historical and cultural context. However, the shift in the emphasis on different groups of meanings may be triggered by new interrelations caused by the changes as such. Bałka incorporated the display case as a part of the sculpture to distance the public and himself from his early work, but also to communicate that the story told by the artwork belongs to the past. This gesture activated new possible associations and, in consequence, interpretations. For instance, the appearance of the display case strengthens the symbolic dialogue of Bałka's sculpture with the aforementioned paintings by Bacon. One of the British artist's first 'pope-paintings', entitled Head IV, is at the same time the first one to include the characteristic motif of a spatial, cubic structure. In the literature it has been referred to as a 'space-frame', 'glass box' or 'cage-like structure'.[140] Interestingly, Bacon repeatedly denied that this motif had any particular meaning, and stated that the rectangular structure helped him to frame and "really see the image – for no other reason" (Sylvester, 2000, p. 37). Regardless of the artist's intentions, the motif is a powerful visual link between Bałka's pope and Bacon's papal portraits. Is this interpretative trace less valid than those offered by the artist himself? Not necessarily, as Bałka often empowers spectators to make sense of

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138   See: footnote 5 in Cooke, 2011, p. 26.

139   The list was published later on in the same catalogue. See: Bałka, M., Sainsbury, H., Tate Modern, & Exhibition. (2009). *Miroslaw Balka: How it is; [on the occasion of the exhibition at Tate Modern, London 13 October 2009-5 April 2010]*. London: Tate Publ.

140   Art historians interpreted the transparent construction as an influence of Giacometti's spatial sculptures, which employed a similar solution.

his artworks in their own way – in the quote opening this subchapter he states that the Black Pope's 'mission' for the New York show was to remind New Yorkers of something that he hadn't thought of but that maybe they would (Bauman et al., 2013).

2.2.4   The Polysemy of an Artwork, the Categories of Meanings

Drawing on the example of Bałka's early work, I have shown how a contemporary artwork continues to take on meanings throughout its whole career, and how this process can result in or be a consequence of a physical modification of the art object. Instead of one singular multi-layered meaning there are multiple, changeable, internal and external features that generate meanings by triggering associations with certain concepts, ideas and events. This process is conditioned by multifarious, often casual circumstances – for instance, my association of the whitewashed boards on which the sculpture was placed during the first exhibition with processional sculptures was elicited unintentionally by the artist himself.[141] Moreover, as the story of the photograph from the first exhibition shows, due to artworks' changeability some of the meaning-making features disappear with time and their associated meanings fall into oblivion. Following this line of thought, the selection of one single meaning as a reference for conservation decisions to be made by the artwork's keeper might be seen as an authoritarian gesture of fixing the artwork in its 'preferred state' against its inherent changeability.

All of the imaginable associations that might potentially generate meanings are impossible to grasp and therefore the collection of meanings related to an artwork is an open-ended, infinite set. Furthermore, none of the artwork's manifestations described above aimed to present all the meanings, even those recognized at that time. As the display of an artwork is always a gesture of selection, *Black Pope, Black Sheep* has never been shown as a whole, but as one of many possible interpretations. However, while a display is a temporary condition of the artwork, conservation refers to an artwork as a whole. Therefore, the conservation decision making needs to build on as many meanings as rationally possible, while acknowledging the fragmentary character of the set.

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141   See: the excerpt of the interview with Bałka, p. 81.

Particular moments in the artwork's trajectory generate features that can trigger new interpretations and/or fix previous ones. In *Black Pope, Black Sheep* these moments are, for instance, the creation of the sculpture and its first exhibition, the Spanish show in which the artwork was reinterpreted as part of an autonomous narrative, the 'mummification' suggested by the addition of the display case, and, last but not least, the artist interview conducted as a result of the process of the piece's musealisation. During the conversation Bałka not only explains the way the display case became part of the work, but also goes through the development of the process. I would argue that the last step of this development actually took place during the interview when Bałka thought of remaking the display case with more 'noble' materials. Thus, the artist interview allows for identifying meanings and reconstructing the story and circumstances of its creation, but also provides a space for the continuation of the creative process. The meanings might be 'forged' during the conversation: for instance, the meanings of the display case, pre-shaped during the events of the preceding months, were actually 'fixed' by the artist during the interview. The interview, both as a process and as an encounter, also triggers new associations that can easily result in meaning making, such as the relation between *Black Pope, Black Sheep* and Bacon's papal paintings, or the whitewashed boards and the uncanny figures of saints from the Spanish processions.

Now we may return to the question that has guided this part of the investigation: whether from now on the display case should be considered a part of the sculpture. Despite the fact that, rather than answering this question directly, what the interview provides is the artist's preferences, for now the answer is affirmative. The display case, together with all the associated meanings, became a significant feature in need of preservation and the artist clearly sanctioned it as such. This affirmation triggers further questions addressing the right approach to the 'new' element from the practical standpoint of the museum's procedures. If the display case is part of the artwork, can it actually be remade from more 'noble' materials as the artist suggested? During the interview Bałka clearly stated that he would not accept reproducing or making display copies of the figures, and the significance of the particular materials is broadly acknowledged as Bałka's trademark. At the same time, he proposes to fabricate a 'new' version of the display case. Is the display case, then, a part of the artwork governed by other rules than the rest of its elements? When remade from more 'noble' materials, will it take on the same status as the pope and the sheep? In terms of museum practices,

the answers to these queries result in practical, everyday decisions. In the case of a loan request, would it be possible to ship only the figures, and avoid the expensive transport of the heavy and fragile glass vitrine by having a copy produced on site? There are no general rules that can provide answers to these questions, and they can only be addressed through common-sense thinking and, while still available, a continuous dialogue with the artist. Finally, does the artwork always need to be displayed with this new addition? Regardless of what the artist has expressed in the interview, I argue that it is not necessary. Following the assumption that all instances of display entail selection and are thus mere interpretations of the artwork, there is no need to exhibit all the meanings or all the physical elements of the piece.[142] In my view, the setting in which the work was displayed in the Spanish monastery continues to be an equally valid sanction and, as such, could be recreated for the purpose of another display. Pursuing this line of thought, the way the sculpture was presented at first – on the whitewashed wooden platform – still remains a possible option for future installations, especially in the framework of exhibitions exploring historical narratives.

This case study reaffirms the artist interview as a useful method of research and documentation. Besides gathering facts, it makes it possible to collect stories that provide hints for conservation-related decision making. It also proves that the information obtained from the interview needs to be completed by and juxtaposed with data from other sources, and the interpretation of these interrelations is what should guide the choices related to the future shape of the artwork. Therefore, the informed decision on the way *Black Pope, Black Sheep* might be displayed in the future shall be made on the basis of interrelations between stories selected from this set, while also considering the remaining ones. For instance, the combination of the whitewashed platform with the display case is not one of the options to choose from, as the information in the set clearly indicates that those two elements were never shown together. This implies that the artist interview needs to be used within the constellation of other stories gathered by different means, an issue that will be explored in detail in the following section.

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142   This does not apply to the sculpture itself, as from the outset it was created as an assemblage of
       two figures, and therefore these are not to be separated.

2.3 *2 1 1 x 1 7 9 x 1 2 5, 1 9 0 x 1 2 9 x 7 3*

> Two issues stood out for me that day, that indeed have been problematic ever since
> the formation of INCCA. Firstly, the 'formal' artist interview that is carefully
> prepared, often filmed and of which a transcript is made is not always the most
> significant or helpful document for making conservation decisions. Informal
> interactions with the artist and the ideas he/she discloses during the installation of
> a work, for example, can provide information 'gems' for the future.
> The challenge remains how to capture such interactions and archive this
> information in such a way it can be helpful in the future. Secondly, despite
> great improvements in information technology in the last decade, it still remains
> a challenge to ensure that even your direct colleagues have access to your
> documentation; let alone international peers and the public.
> (te Brake-Baldock, 2 0 1 4, para. 1)

2.3.1   Reporting Conversation, Documenting Collaboration

Contrary to the rather imprecise and contested notion of artist intent, the artist's
sanctions are concrete acts and communications through which she or he stipulates the
artwork's meaning-making features (Irvin, 2 0 0 5). This includes the way artists install
their artworks when put on display, their alteration of art objects, as well as all of their
statements – oral and written – related to a particular piece. Following Irvin's words,
"if being true to the work is something that matters to us" artist sanctions need to be
taken into consideration both for the reading of the work as well as for the management
of its possible future shapes (Irvin, 2 0 0 5, p. 3 2 5). However, as contemporary artworks
are inherently changeable, artists often modify their sanctions and the latest sanctions
might even contradict those imposed in the past. Based on the assumption that the best
way to identify, understand and collect artists' sanctions is through collaboration with
artists, this section looks at the means through which artists sanction their artworks,
how sanctions might evolve in time, how they are documented in the museum setting,
and how they might be used in conservation decision making.[143]

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143   A more detailed account of the story has been published in Wielocha, A. (2 0 1 7). El registro
de los vínculos entre el museo y el artista y su impacto en el ámbito de la conservación y
restauración. In *Conservación de Arte Contemporáneo. 18a Jornada* (pp. 9 5–1 0 4). Madrid:
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía.

Figure 14. Mirosław Bałka, *211x179x125, 190x129x73* at *Sonsbeek 93*. Installation view of primary location of the concrete element near Moscowa cemetery in Arnhem. Source: KMM Archive. Photographer: unknown.

The starting point of this investigation is the report by Andrée van de Kerckhove, a former conservator at the Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterlo (hereinafter referred to as KMM), considering a collaboration between the museum and Mirosław Bałka on challenges related to the care and display of the work entitled *211x179x125, 190x129x73* (1993) acquired by the institution in 1993 (van de Kerckhove, 2000).[144]

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144   The report was inspired by and written for one of INCCA's early initiatives, the so-called 'Bałka Pilot Project'. Between 2000 and 2002, various INCCA members and partner institutions got involved in diverse activities related to Bałka's oeuvre, from organising exhibitions to acquiring artworks (Hummelen & Scholte, 2004). This was a perfect occasion to embark on a project dedicated to testing the capabilities and limitations of an online database as a platform to share and exchange information collected from artists with other conservation professionals (Hummelen & Scholte, 2006). The idea behind the 'Bałka Pilot Project' was to plant the seed of the conservation-oriented 'artist's archive' by collecting information obtained from the artist by various network members in different contexts. The objective was to establish a source compiling an inventory of important conservation issues related to the work of the Polish sculptor. Consequently, this 'catalogue' was meant to help in choosing the suitable documentation method for artworks from Bałka's oeuvre and inspire questions to pose during artist interviews (Hummelen & Scholte, 2006). The result was a set of documents: descriptions of artworks, interview transcripts, reports from joint work with the artist, installation instructions and drawings, photographs, and notes from discussions between members of the network. The archive of INCCA's 'Bałka Pilot Project' is to this day an exceptional documentation of the collaboration between an artist and various museum professionals affiliated with different institutions.

Figure 15. Mirosław Bałka, *211x179x125, 190x129x73* at *Sonsbeek 93*. Installation view of primary location of the concrete element near Moscowa cemetery in Arnhem. Source: KMM Archive. Photographer: unknown.

The main purpose of the text was to document the conversation between Kerckhove and Bałka that took place on the occasion of the artist's visit to the museum. Although the conservator reports events taking place seven years after the acquisition, she constantly refers back to facts from the past as recorded in the documents held in the museum archive. Quoted and paraphrased fragments of the conversation intertwine with the results of archival research and Kerckhove's personal opinions and reflections. Even though the report does not meet the requirements of the artist interview, it provides what interview transcripts usually do not offer – remarkable insights into the process of collaboration as such. The report is written in the form of a research diary that covers ten days dedicated to researching the piece and starts one day after Bałka's visit to the KMM. The text ends with a short summary listing the characteristics of the discussed artwork that Kerckhove considered important from a conservation perspective. The appendix consists of a catalogue of actions to be performed as a consequence of both Kerckhove's research and the artist's visit, and a short undated note entitled Latest News.[145] As the final note states, the report was read and approved by the artist. My

145 The report was uploaded to the INCCA archive as an open Microsoft Word document with three images of the artwork attached. For the purpose of this research and to facilitate reference, the report was titled, its pages were numbered and the document was converted to pdf.
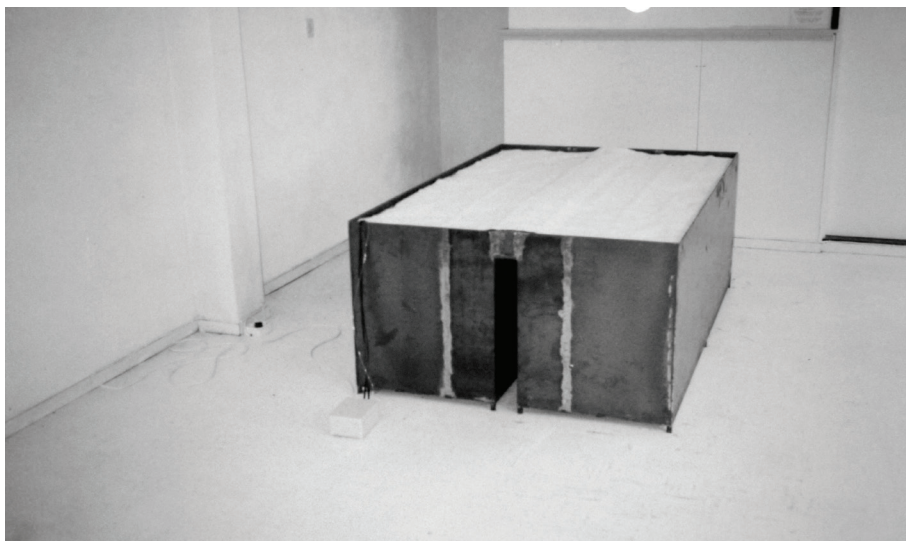
Figure 16. Mirosław Bałka, *211x179x125, 190x129x73* installation view from the exhibition *Sonsbeek 93*. The steel element in its primary location in Arnhem. Source: KMM Archive. Photographer: unknown.

own research, conducted in 2016, was prompted by learning that after more than 20 years *211x179x125, 190x129x73* would be disassembled from the permanent display and moved to the museum storage. As such events are usually significant moments in an artwork's career provoking questions concerning its future, my study sought to follow real, practical problems approached from the perspective of institutional practices.

211x179x125, 190x129x73 was originally created as a contribution to the *Sonsbeek 93* sculpture exhibition in Arnhem and consists of two parts.[146] The first one is a concrete cuboid construction sunken into the ground, recalling a double grave (Figure 14-15). On one of its walls, two concrete seats are mounted that stick out above ground level. The second element is a negative of the inner space of the first one, made of Corten steel and filled with soil (Figure 16). Its top is partially covered by a piece of white textile with a heating device hidden underneath, set to the temperature of 36,6°C. The size of each element of the sculpture is of great importance, firstly because it is referred to in the title of the work and, secondly, because it alludes to the measurements of

146   For more information about the Sonsbeek exhibitions see: http://www.sonsbeek.org/en/about/.

Figure 17. Mirosław Bałka, *211x179x125, 190x129x73*. Concrete element on the permanent display at the Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterlo. Source: KMM Archive. Photographer: unknown.

Bałka's own body.[147] In Arnhem, the two elements of the work were installed in different locations: while the concrete cuboid was shown outside the local cemetery fence, the steel container was placed in an abandoned house in the red-light district of the city. After the end of the show the piece was acquired by KMM, where the concrete element was installed outdoors, in the corner of the front garden close to the junction between two museum buildings – the old and the new one (Figure 17 -18), while the steel cuboid was placed nearby but inside the museum gallery (Figure 19).[148]

147   In this case to Bałka's height, which is 190 cm; see: Maria Morzuch and Miroslaw Bałka, 'Interview', in Muzeum w Lodzi 1931–1992: Collection-Documentation-Actualité, exhibition catalogue, Musée d'Art Contemporain, Lyon 1992, p. 262

148   Van de Kerckhove (2000, p. 4) describes the placement of the sculpture in the museum as follows: "Miroslaw chose a new location for the work at the point where the Van de Velde Building adjoins the newer section which provided the first large sculpture hall and which formed the transition to the museum's new wing. Both the concrete element, placed outdoors, and the steel elements, inside the building, are located in relatively secluded corner positions in and just outside this transitional zone. Miroslaw chose a place for the concrete component next to the first large window of the old sculpture hall. It is noteworthy that here too he chose a place 'just outside the boundary'. The component is in the museum's front garden, effectively 'outside' the museum. It is hardly visible to the visitors entering the museum because it is located some distance from the path behind a corner of the building".

Figure 18. Mirosław Bałka, *211x179x125, 190x129x73*. Concrete element on the permanent display at the Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterlo. Source: KMM Archive. Photographer: unknown.

Unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity to see the piece on display. Upon my arrival in Otterlo, I learned that the concrete element had been partially disassembled only a couple of days earlier, while the steel one had been moved from the gallery to offsite storage months earlier due to its unfortunate location. After the relocation of the piece from Arnhem, the steel element was placed in the busy entrance to the exhibition space, where it was interfering in the spatial design of temporary shows and misleading the public.[149] Moreover, as there was no direct visual connection between the elements of the sculpture, it was difficult for visitors to read these two objects as one piece. The removal from display triggered questions related to the artwork's future. The former location was not a suitable one, both for the artwork's legibility and the management of the museum space. Would it be possible in the future to reinstall the elements of the work in a different place within the museum grounds without putting the artwork's identity at risk? If so, what criteria should be applied when choosing the new setting? Should the elements removed from the exhibition be stored and reinstalled in the new location, or could they be reconstructed according to a precise documentation made beforehand? These questions, hypothetical but at the same time rooted in the real events, were formulated specifically for the purpose of this research as a method for examining possible sources of an artist's sanctions and their application in conservation-related decision making.

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149   S. Kensche, in-person interview, September 26, 2016.
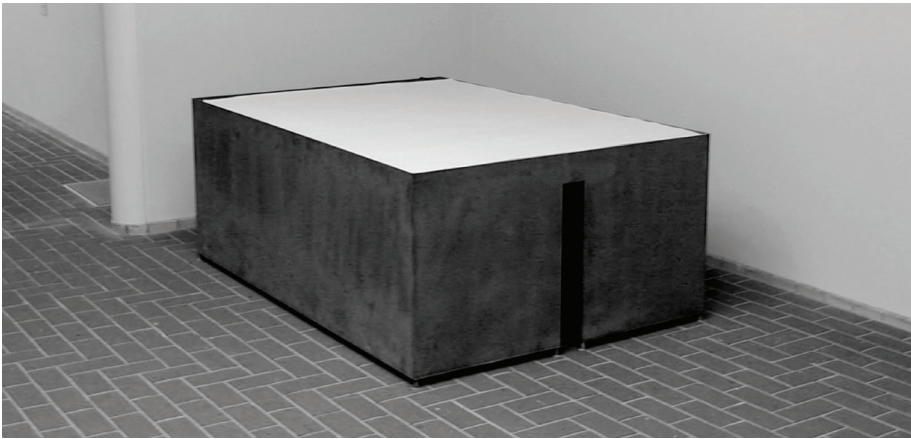
Figure 19. Mirosław Bałka, *211x179x125, 190x129x73*. Steel element on the permanent display at the Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterlo. Source: KMM Archive. Photographer: unknown.

2.3.2   <u>Sanctionable Features: Relocating the site-specific</u>

This section presents the history of *211x179x125, 190x129x73,* identifies its potential meanings, and demonstrates how these were affected by the initial relocation of the piece to the museum grounds. As mentioned, Bałka usually does not explain his concepts directly, but rather provides associations considered as potential starting points for interpretation. In this case, some of these meaning-making leads are rooted in events that took place before the actual work was created, and only the recollection of those circumstances allows one to grasp how the artwork took shape. These episodes can be traced through the letters exchanged between Valerie Smith, the curator of the *Sonsbeek 93* show and the artist, published in the exhibition's catalogue. Each of the above excerpts offers insights into the work in progress and demonstrates how the creative process unfolded through conversations.

> Spent the day with Miroslaw Bałka. We had a little lunch in his home
> in Otwock, saw a pheasant out of the window, then went to the house
> of his grandparents, which he proudly bought last summer. Five rooms,
> the linoleum floor worn in the places where habits were formed. The
> humbleness and the sanctity of the place are present in Miroslaw's work.
> It occurred to him one day that this is what his work had to be about.
> He took me to the Jewish graveyard in Otwock [...]. Then we went to the

Christian cemetery to visit the graves of his grandfather and grandmother on both sides. [...] We went to his grandparents' house and he showed me his work. (V. Smith, Brand, & Muynck, 1993, pp. 22–23)

[...] I just read and looked at your revised proposals and I still love them both ... of course l liked the original concept of the house upside down, but I think that the visitors will get the feeling of 'house' when they see the stone plate in a room in a house that they have to walk into. The idea of 'house' or 'home' will be reinforced then. Yet, on the other hand putting the plate of white terrazzo in the red-light district gives it another connotation altogether. (V. Smith et al., 1993, p. 58.

Quoted fragments, selected as a catalogue description for Bałka's contribution to *Sonsbeek 93*, indicate that two motifs – a home and a tomb – were present in the artist's thinking from the very beginning of the project.[150] These are also visible in preparatory sketches, where one can observe that what finally became a grave developed from the idea of a cast of a house placed upside-down in the ground (Figure 20-21). Both tomb and home are significant themes in Bałka's life and oeuvre – his grandfather made tombstones for a living and his father engraved them – while home – the artist's family house in Otwock – is a point of reference for many of Bałka's works (see: p. 91). In the primary location of the piece in the vicinity of the Arnhem cemetery, the concrete component of *211x179x125, 190x129x73* would be immediately understood as a grave-like construction. The two elements of the piece are connected not only by the fact that the steel element is a negative of the concrete one, but also in that the soil that fills the first must be taken out from the spot in which the latter is placed.[151] The note on one of the artist's preparatory sketches for *211x179x125, 190x129x73* suggests that the artwork was created specifically for particular sites in Arnhem, and at the outset translocation was not considered (Figure 22). It states that after the end

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150   One of the focuses of *Sonsbeek 93* was the notion of 'process' – many of the commissioned works were more about the process of creation or reception than the finished product. The catalogue reflected this idea, as instead of showing the pictures of the artworks, it presents the process of collaboration between Smith and the artists. See: Smith et al., 1993.

151   Interestingly, the connection between both pieces, obscured by their translocation, was not evident either during the Arnhem show. In the essay written on the occasion of Bałka's exhibition in Valencia, while recalling the artist's contribution for *Sonsbeek 93* art critic Juan Vincente Aliaga speaks about the two elements as separate artworks (Aliaga, 1997, p. 141).
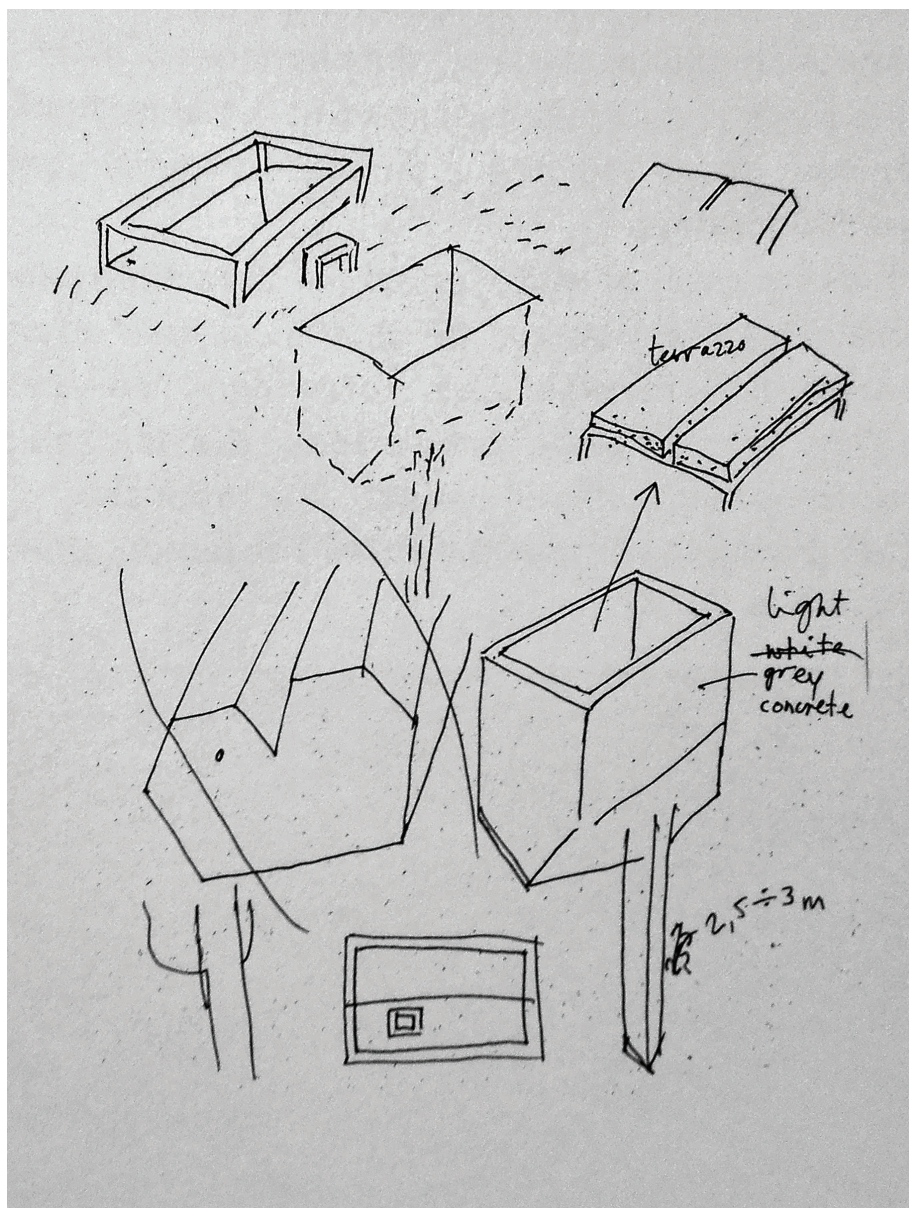
Figure 20. Mirosław Bałka, One of preparatory sketches for *211x179x125, 190x129x73*. Source: Smith, V., Brand, J., & Muynck, C. de (Eds.). (1993). Sonsbeek. Gent: Snoeck-Ducaju & Zoon, p. 57. The original drawing belongs to KMM collection (inventory number: KM 106.484).

Figure 21. Mirosław Bałka, one of preparatory sketches for *211x179x125, 190x129x73*. Source: Smith, V., Brand, J., & Muynck, C. de (Eds.). (1993). Sonsbeek, Gent: Snoeck-Ducaju & Zoon, p. 58. The original drawing is part of the KMM collection (inventory number: KM 103.384).

of the exhibition "what will stay it will be two small chairs waiting behind the fence of the cemetery" (Foksal Gallery Foundation. (1993, March 23). [Fax]. KMM Archive, Otterlo, p. 3/4).

The story of relocating and shaping the final look of the piece together with the artist on the museum grounds can be reconstructed on the basis of Kerckhove's report and the documents kept in the museum archive. The process of dismantling, transporting and re-installing the piece after the end of *Sonsbeek 93* was personally supervised by Evert van Straaten, then director of KMM. According to his notes, the new location of both pieces on the museum grounds was meticulously marked *in situ* by the artist (Bloemheuvel & Kooten, 2007, p. 156). Kerckhove confirms this fact in her report by stating that Bałka "specified the placing in the Kröller-Müller Museum precisely (although no drawings were made)" (van de Kerckhove, 2000, p. 3). The catalogue of the KMM collection states that "Balka used the purchase of the artwork as an opportunity to improve his work in the sense of giving it a more universal meaning, now that it was separated from the social context of Arnhem and its direct relationship with the cemetery" (Bloemheuvel & Kooten, 2007, p. 156). However,

Figure 22. Mirosław Bałka, One of preparatory sketches for *211x179x125, 190x129x73* with instructions for the production of the piece and a note about the location of the concrete piece in relation to the cemetery fence. Sent by fax from Foksal Gallery Foundation on 23rd of March 1993. Source: KMM archive.

a careful comparison of photographs from both sites might lead to the conclusion that by translocating the work something important was lost, while the acquired 'universal meaning' was not easily perceptible. In the museum's garden the 'tombness' of the outdoor sculpture was no longer as clear as it had been in the vicinity of the cemetery. As the report informs us, when Kerckhove asked the artist about the link between the initial setting, the new one and the reading of the piece, Bałka responded that "in a certain way, a museum is also a kind of cemetery" (van de Kerckhove, 2000, p. 5). Careful analysis of the visual records of both displays leads to the conclusion that there are few clear parallels between the arrangement of the two elements in their initial and final settings. For instance, while in Arnhem the seats from the outdoor part faced away from the cemetery fence, in KMM they were facing the museum wall. There are also significant differences between how the indoor steel part was positioned in both locations. In Arnhem, the distance between the walls and the box was substantial – it was possible to access the piece from all sides – while in KMM's gallery it was placed literally in the corner of the room.

The Museum archive holds another note by van Straaten for the technicians responsible for the translocation, in which the director specifies elements that need to be moved from Arnhem: "The museum takes only: the concrete sculpture, the

empty metal container the heating element and the flannel blanket" (Bloemheuvel & Kooten, 2007, p. 156). Nevertheless, Kerckhove states clearly that the only original component that was actually kept was the concrete one. Although there is no detailed documentation on the state in which the latter reached the museum, Kerckhove notes that there were numerous repairs made at the time of translocation, which became visible after the structure was cleaned by museum staff at the end of 2000 (van de Kerckhove, 2000, p. 9). The steel box turned out not to be strong enough to be reused, as the metal sheets where too thin and the welds had begun to crack under the weight of the filling soil. The museum team ultimately decided to reconstruct it, carefully following the original dimensions. The new version varies from the original in that, while the metal surface of the box made for the abandoned house in Arnhem's red-light district was only partially covered by the products of corrosion (Figure 16), the new one was made with weathering steel known under the trademark Corten, which develops a unified protective layer of rust (Figure 19). According to Kerckhove, these changes were consulted with and approved by the artist.[152]

The story of the third element – the white textile with the heating system – is even more complicated. The one from the first manifestation could not be reused for the second one due to the objections of the museum technical department, who assessed the electric system as hazardous (van de Kerckhove, 2000, p. 5).[153] The 'blanket' is

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152 "Both the museum's technical department and the artist confirmed that the steel sheeting was too thin and that the welds were breaking under the pressure of the box's contents. The box was therefore reconstructed. The new embodiment was made of 5mm Corten steel sheeting. The dimensions given in the title of the work (which correspond to those in drawings made for the Sonsbeek exhibition) were applied, so that the general size and proportions are identical. The artist 'revised' the work" (van de Kerckhove, 2000, p. 5).

153 This book follows the glossary of key terms in contemporary art conservation included in the most recent version of *The Decision-Making Model for Contemporary Art Conservation and Presentation* (Giebeler et al., 2019), which defines an artwork's 'manifestation' as follows: "Manifestation refers to a discrete occurrence or instance of a work in time and space; a physical embodiment of expression (DOCAM); an action or object that gives form to an abstract entity. This term also implies an element of variability — a manifestation is a discrete occurrence, one of multiple possible spatial and temporal instances of a work." (Z. Miller & Röck, 2019). See also: Castriota, B. (2018). Centres in Flux: Authenticity in the Persistence and Recurrence of Contemporary Artworks. In: Book of Abstracts. NACCA Symposium 2018. From different perspectives to common grounds in contemporary art conservation, 25 - 26 June 2018, Cologne Institute of Conservation Sciences, TH Köln, p. 19.

a recurrent subject discussed in the correspondence between van Straaten and Bałka, and apparently it was not easy to find a solution that could satisfy both sides.[154] According to Kerckhove, during his stay in Otterlo in 1994, the artist decided to take the original piece of textile with him back to Poland as a reference in order to find a new one. Van Straaten kept a fragment of the fabric and deposited it in the institutional archive.[155] Unfortunately, as he would inform the director, the artist's search was not successful.[156] Finally, the museum team went ahead and installed the indoor piece, choosing the textile and the heating element themselves to mimic their appearance as recorded in the photographic documentation of the Arnhem show. The 'blanket' produced by the KMM was fitted precisely to the dimensions of the box, with the edges turned up to prevent them from fraying. Kerckhove affirms that the solution had been accepted by the artist, and the work was shown in that shape for the next five years.[157] However, in December 2000 during his visit to the museum Bałka expressed his considerable dissatisfaction with the appearance the indoor element, especially the 'blanket'. He requested that the textile should touch just three walls of the steel box

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154 The 'blanket issue' is mentioned various times in the correspondence between Bałka and Evert van Straaten, starting with the letter from 1994: "In the case of electric blanket we talked about in the Lipchitz' room [the solution] is very good. With the heating cables, can You find and ask in the place where they make electric-blankets is it possible to get only heating cables, so we can glue them to the felt and cover the earth in steel box. (The cables from Arnhem where too heavy I think.) Can you check it please?" (Bałka, M. (1994, April 20). [Letter to Evert van Straaten]. KMM Archive, Otterlo). Bałka returned to the 'blanket-issue' in his next letter to van Straaten, by asking if it would be possible to discuss the problem during his upcoming visit to the museum: "I would like during my stay in Otterlo to discuss with you a new project and finish old one (piece inside - do you think that it will be possible to get electric-heating cover?...)" (van de Kerckhove, 2000, p. 5).

155 The fragment of textile is accompanied by a handwritten, partially indecipherable note by Evert van Straaten. Also van de Kerckhove (2000, p. 7) mentions that "Evert was the one who therefore preserved a remnant of the flannel" and "The piece of flannel is kept in the museum's materials archives". In the next letter, the director ensures the artist that "we kept all materials for the Sonsbeek piece together now, till you will find a suitable electric blanket in Poland" (Van Straaten, E. (1994, October 25). [Letter to Mirosław Bałka]. KMM Archive, Otterlo).

156 "I checked the situation with electric blankets on polish [sic] market. And this dosen't [sic] look positive. The blankets they have (this is what I found) have 70-W, and they are pluged [sic] directly to 220V. So maybe we should say 'I am sorry' to the old Sonsbeek' heating cables. [...]" (Bałka, M (1994, October 26). [Letter to Evert van Straaten]. KMM Archive, Otterlo).

157 There is no precise information on how and when Bałka accepted the result. It is possible that he inspected the work himself during his next visit to Otterlo, on 1 August 1995. See: van de Kerckhove, 2000, p. 5.

and be shortened so as to uncover a strip of soil the exact width of the artist's palm.[158] Moreover, from the outset there was a misunderstanding regarding the type of textile which should cover the heating cables. In all of the correspondence between Bałka and van Straaten, the material proposed by the artist seems to be felt, while both the blanket from Arnhem and the reconstructed one were made of flannel. Kerckhove's report ends with an undated note stating, "Bałka has informed me that he bought a new blanket" (van de Kerckhove, 2000, p. 9) and the photographic documentation in the KMM archive dated March 2001 depicts Kerckhove herself preparing a new felt cover for the steel box. There is, however, no recorded evidence of Bałka approving the ultimate solution.[159]

2.3.3 From Accumulated Sanctions to Artwork-Related Documentation

The history of *211x179x125, 190x129x73* has made it possible to identify the artist's sanctions that establish features pointing to the piece's potential interpretations and thus meanings. The initial physical features of the artwork were sanctioned by Bałka through the final drawings and instructions made for the exhibition in Arnhem (Figure 21-22) and the display of elements documented through photographs. The decision to relocate the piece, the choice of the new location and the replacement of the elements implied a new set of sanctions, established in collaboration with the museum and recorded, among others, in the notes by the former museum director held in the museum archive. The most recent sanctions, documented in Kerckhove's report, concern the final appearance of the textile 'blanket' covering the soil in the steel box.

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158   "The point is that the flannel is not well placed. The cloth is supposed to touch three edges and leave a 12 cm border of sand (roughly the same width as his hand) exposed on the fourth side." (van de Kerckhove, 2000, p. 6).

159   In the handwritten note by Evert van Straaten that accompanies the fragment of fabric held in the museum archive, the last sentence states, "The current piece of cloth is too tight! and would have to be replaced" (*De huidige lap stof is te krap! en zou dus vervangen moeten worden* – translation from Dutch by Lise Steyn). The size and kind of textile used for the 'blanket' were not the only issues that the artist was unsatisfied with. Although the piece was from the outset intended for interaction with the public – to perceive the 'human' heat of the blanket visitors need to put their hands on it – the museum labelled the inner element with a 'do not touch' sign. This decision was made because of two factors: firstly, the hazardous curiosity of what is hidden behind the blanket and what the source of the felt's warmth is, and secondly, the white fabric getting constantly dirty. Bałka requested to remove the ban on touching and to encourage people to interact with the piece through a 'please touch' label.

While the way the artist sanctioned the physical aspects of the piece can be identified by analysing the sequence of key events in the artwork's trajectory, the establishment of conceptual features is more difficult to tackle. The most important associations for the artwork's reading, i.e. the notions of home and grave, are conveyed through the artist's biography (for instance the story of the artist's grandfather and father), the preparatory drawings, the conversations between the curator and the artist published in the catalogue of the show, as well as the initial setting of the piece (in an abandoned house/near the cemetery).

To evaluate the use of artists' sanctions as references for conservation-related decision making, the issue of the relationship between earlier and later sanctions needs to be addressed. Do later sanctions override earlier ones? The decision to relocate the piece to the museum grounds implied new sanctions which ran counter to the previous ones. Assuming that *211x179x125, 190x129x73* was conceived as site-specific, not only in terms of physical location but also as embedded in the context of the *Sonsbeek 93* exhibition and its themes, the initial location of the piece is one of the most significant features sanctioned by the artist. If we consider that sanctions are replaceable and only the latter ones should be considered for meaning making, we could assume that since the 'tombness' as a feature of the outdoor piece is less perceivable in the new location, this meaning must have lost its importance in comparison to the first one. However, as the reading of a contemporary artwork does not depend only on the art object, in its new location *211x179x125, 190x129x73* would be still associated with the home, beds, graves, duality and the connection between life and death. Hence, based on the standpoint that changeability is an inherent feature of contemporary artworks and an artwork exists in various forms, I propose to consider the artist's sanctions as not replaceable but accumulative.

In her analysis and evaluation of the possible strategies for securing the artwork's continuation, Kerckhove adopted a different standpoint: to draw exclusively on the last manifestation of the piece. Although the history of the artwork and the artist's sanctions were well documented by the museum, for Kerckhove the information collected seemed to be too scarce to allow for the relocation of the piece within the museum grounds without risking the alteration of some of its meaning-making features:

> If it were necessary to move Bałka's work in the Kröller-Müller Museum and someone else were to attempt to do so, the risk of taking a 'wrong decision' would [be] higher than for many other works. However well-intended the approach of that other person might be, there would be a serious risk of either producing an excessive ('wrong') harmony with the surroundings or – in an overzealous attempt to avoid that pitfall – overstressing the identity of the work and giving it an overbearing presence (van de Kerckhove, 2000, p. 3).

As a consequence, Kerckhove decided to discuss this subject directly with the artist. She suggested that if the architecture of the museum were to undergo changes, it might be necessary to relocate the piece again in the future. The artist's response was concise: "ask me when it comes to it, and if I'm no longer here ask my son" (van de Kerckhove, 2000, p. 3). One can read between the lines of Kerckhove's report that at that time Bałka was not interested in giving the institution the 'access code' to his artwork. His choices related to the new location were not documented, as probably many of them were more intuitive than rational, and as such difficult for the artist to express and for observers to understand. It is much easier to work with concrete instructions, such as the detailed measurements provided for the first manifestation of the piece; however, in art one must accept that not everything is quantifiable.

Nevertheless, if one considers artist sanctions not as replaceable but rather as accumulative, the range of information that can feed decisions about its next manifestation becomes much broader. Following this line of thought, KMM's decision on the future location of the piece might be informed by the features of both previous ones. Moreover, Bałka's choice to relocate the artwork might also be seen as sanctioning it as a 'movable' piece that can be adapted to different locations. The same principle may be applied to the two reconstructed elements. If they were once sanctioned as replaceable, they might be reconstructed again in the future.

This case study has shown that the artist's sanctions, although helpful as references in analysing the development of an artwork's career, can also be ambiguous and contradictory, and, as such, subject to different interpretations. Therefore, a particular sanction established by the artist should not be seen as the ultimate reference for

shaping an artwork's perpetuation, but rather contextualised within the broader sequence of events. This means that the identity of an artwork, including all its potential interpretations, is dependent not only on the features sanctioned most recently, but also on all decisions made and actions carried out by the artist throughout the artwork's entire career. This reflection allows the focus to be shifted from the current features of an art object to features of the artwork recorded in the artwork-related documentation, whose quality can then be assessed.

Although the core of this study was Kerckhove's report, from the outset it was clear that it was necessary to consult other sources as well. The KMM is a small-scale museum and it has just one collection-related archive where both conservation and curatorial file information about the artworks is stored. In the case of Bałka's piece, among typical documents that can be encountered in most of the museum archives – registration data and acquisition records, invoices and contracts included, and all documentation of the care and maintenance of the artworks – it holds a fascinating collection of correspondence. There are letters, faxes and emails exchanged between the artist and the museum, along with communications carried out with and by the museum director, including semi-private ones such as Christmas cards. It is worth mentioning here that the discussed artwork is not the only sculpture by Bałka in the KMM collection. Just after the acquisition of the piece from *Sonsbeek 93*, the director commissioned a new work, which made it possible to maintain an active dialogue on *211x179x125, 190x129x73* long after the translocation of the artwork was finalized.[160] The analysis of Kerckhove's report together with the content of the artwork's documentation collected in the KMM archive demonstrated how even minor interactions between museums and artists, if documented, can contribute to and inform the conservation-oriented decision making. Numerous letters, faxes, invoices, notes and sketches meticulously gathered in one folder during the long collaboration between Bałka and the museum, provided valuable new information about micro-decisions that influenced the shape of the artwork. In the context of a museum, documents related to the collected piece, both as an artwork and an art object that had been built or manufactured and later paid for, are often distributed across different archives, for instance an exhibitions archive or an administrative one. At the KMM, thanks to the awareness of the museum staff,

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160   200x238x95, Ø 19x16 (fountain) (1996-2001), inventory number: KM 130.516.

in this particular case the conservator and the museum director, these records were brought together to form one rich body of artwork-related documentation – a collection of the artist's sanctions and an overview of the circumstances in which they were set.

As the case study has made clear, it is collaboration with the artist that makes it possible to collect the artist's sanctions. Undoubtedly, neither the conservator's report nor other documents analysed in this section provide enough space to develop the sort of narratives encompassed by the artist interview. Kerckhove's report is a clearly personal testimony and the artist's statements are filtered through the memory and perception of the author. However, although her thoughts, doubts, and opinions are hardly distinguishable from the facts, they add a new level of information, or in other words a new perspective on the artist's stories. As such, they constitute a valuable contribution to the artwork-related documentation.

2.4   *After-Easter Show*

> As a result of the good will arising from Tate's collaboration with the artist on the Unilever Series 2009 and the recent acquisition of the video work Carousel 2004, the artist has offered a gift of sculptural material relating to his early performance work After-Easter show. [...] Although the individual elements have been shown by the artist in more than one context, he has now decided that these elements should be brought together in one collection and shown as an assemblage, perhaps in combination with documentation of the performance itself. Acceptance of the proposed gift will mean that Balka's performative work is represented in the Collection for the first time. (Sainsbury, 2010, p. 1)

2.4.1   What is Significant?

In her seminal article *Authenticity, Change and Loss in the Conservation of Time-Based Media Installations*, Laurenson (2006) proposes that conservation might be understood as the means by which the significant properties of an artwork are documented, understood and maintained. She argues that the identification and examination of significant properties helps in recognizing where to focus attention in order to understand what is important for the conservation of a particular work (Laurenson, 2014). This subchapter takes as its starting point Laurenson's opinion

that the artist interview remains a means for artists to articulate significant properties of their work (Laurenson, 2006, para. 48) and for keepers to identify and document them. Following this assumption, it looks at how judgements regarding what is significant might be established during and through the artist interview, and demonstrates that this depends on the context in which the interview is carried out and, when used as a reference, on how it has been interpreted.

This case study begins with the story recalled by Bałka in the interview about *Black Pope, Black Sheep* conducted at the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw (see: p. 108) concerning his collaboration with Tate's conservation department in restoring one of his early artworks. Taking into consideration the long-term relationship between Bałka and Tate and the fact that this particular museum is considered a leader in the research and development of practices related to the care of contemporary artworks, I decided to explore how the collaboration between the artist and the institution unfolded and how it was documented.[161]
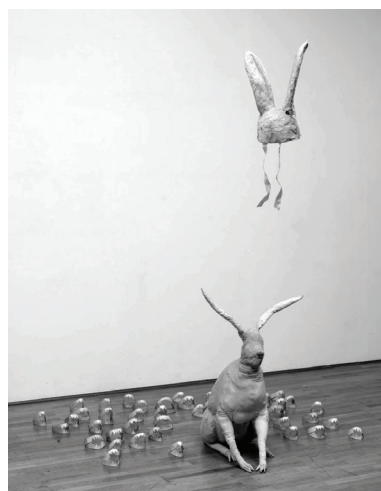
Figure 23-24. Mirosław Bałka, *After-Easter Show*. Retrieved from: http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/balka-after-easter-show-t13263. ©Miroslaw Balka and Tate. Photographer: unknown.

161   Bałka's collaboration with Tate started in late 1994, with the acquisition of his early sculpture Fire Place (1986). In 1995 this and other sculptures were included in the major show *Rites of Passage: Art for the end of the century*. In 1995 Tate organized a Bałka solo exhibition, *Dawn* (11/1995-1/1996), acquiring five pieces displayed there. The artist then reused these pieces in the group show *Between Cinema and a Hard Place*. In 1998-9 Tate acquired two early works: *Ø7,5x159x16,5-195x47x90-Ø6x18 cm* (1991) and *Oasis* (*C.D.F*) (1989). The culmination of their collaboration was the 2009 Unilever Series commission, when Bałka built the monumental *How It Is* in the Turbine Hall. Tate's last acquisition of his work was in 2010 with the video installation *Carrousel* (2004). Information on this collaboration was compiled during research in the Tate Archives in 1/2017, along with information from Tate's website.
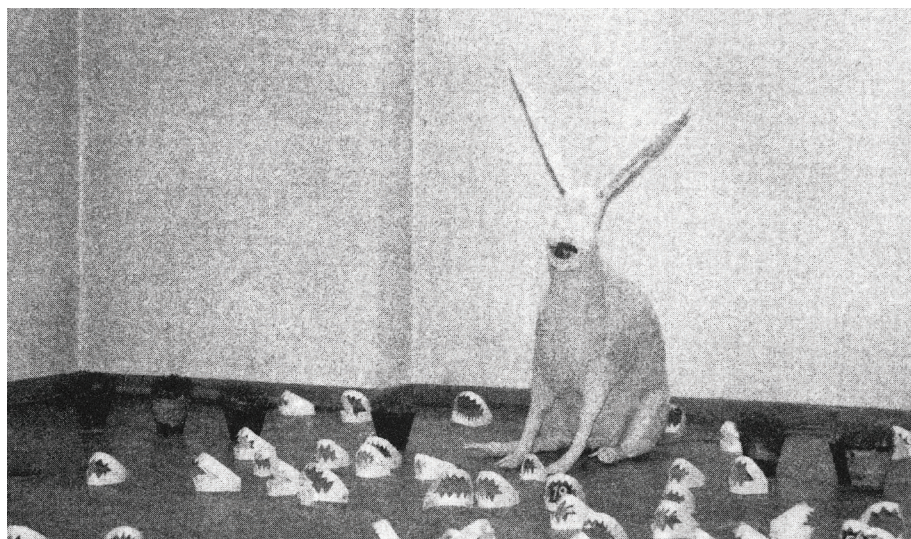
Figure 25. Mirosław Bałka, *After-Easter Show* (Pokaz postświąteczny), 1st of April 1986, Gallery Wieża, Warsaw. Source: Redzisz, K., & Sienkiewicz, K. (2012). Świadomość. Neue Bieriemiennost. Warsaw: Open Art Projects, p. 89. Photographer: Joanna Kiliszek.

The artwork described by Bałka as restored together with conservators from Tate is entitled *After-Easter Show* (1986) and, as depicted in photographs published on the Tate website, it consists of a white rabbit figure, a hat with rabbit ears suspended above the latter, and a set of metal foothold traps arranged on the floor (Figure 23-24).[162] The rabbit is stitched together from diverse kinds of fabric, shaped over a metal frame reinforced with steel mesh and stuffed with textile.[163] The hat with a papier-mâché-like appearance is decorated with textile ribbons attached on its rear.[164] The forty-three traps, whose shape resembles jaws, are made of steel and painted white. According to the artist's story, in the late 1980s the piece was purchased by a minor Polish museum and since then had been kept in inadequate conditions which resulted

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162   See: http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/balka-after-easter-show-t13263

163   The materials are described according to the list form the *Pre-Acquisition Condition Report* consulted in the Tate Archive: Deighton, S., Sculpture conservation pre-acquisition condition report, 22 February 2011, T13263 Conservation File, Tate Archive, London.

164   The identification of the materials made by the conservator in the pre-acquisition condition report was later on revised by the artist: "l think [...] it was like clothes or it was just paint maybe the thick paint because it looks strange to be papier-mâché. I am not sure but maybe it was very thin textile [...]" (Rolfe, 2011, p. 1).

in serious damage due to pest infestation (Figure 33).[165] Bałka withdraw the piece from the collection and repaired it himself with the clear intention of afterwards depositing it with Tate.[166] Only the rabbit-ear hat was left in its current state, as the artist decided that this element should be restored by the museum team. In 2011, upon the accession of the piece to the museum collection, Bałka visited Tate's premises to be interviewed about the artwork by the sculpture conservator responsible for new acquisitions. The conversation was recorded, transcribed and deposited in *After-Easter Show's* file in the museum archive, which I consulted during the fieldwork carried out in 2017. The following sections present the origins of the artwork and its early interpretations, and track its transformation from a performance piece to a sculpture and how this change has been embraced, documented and endorsed by the institution.

2.4.2   Representation of a Performative Artwork:
            In search of the artwork's identity

As described by art critic and curator Anda Rottenberg (1994), *After-Easter Show*, which took place on the 1st of April 1986 at Gallery Wieża in Warsaw, was an 'exhibition-action', an event that in today's nomenclature would be called a performance.[167] It was one in a series of 'holiday exhibitions' – artistic actions by *Neue Bierremiennost'*, a collective consisting of Bałka and two of his friends (Rottenberg, 1994, p. 16).[168] This one was organized on April Fools' Day, which in 1986 fell on the first Tuesday after the Easter holiday. At that time Gallery Wieża was located in the tower of an active church, and the setting placed the event in the framework of religious rituals. The performance started with a lottery – three people from the

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165   M. Bałka, in-person interview, July 27, 2015.

166   And also to teach a lesson to the former owner: "Yes, that was my ambition, to do bring the sculpture to life, also to show the other institution this is not the way it works, especially that they had really been destroying the sculpture by their ignorance and the way they treated it you know". See: Rolfe, M. (2011, April). Interview with Miroslaw Balka. [Interview transcript]. T13263 Conservation File. Tate Archive, London.

167   The *After-Easter Show* (original title in Polish: "Pokaz postświąteczny") was curated by Joanna Kiliszek. The description of the event offered here combines information from various sources, mainly: Rottenberg, 1994; Redzisz & Sienkiewicz, 2012, p. 86; and the interview with Joanna Kiliszek conducted by the author on 15 January 2017 in London.

168   Marek Kijewski and Miroslaw Filonik; more information about *Neue Bierremiennost* can be found in Redzisz & Sienkiewicz, 2012.
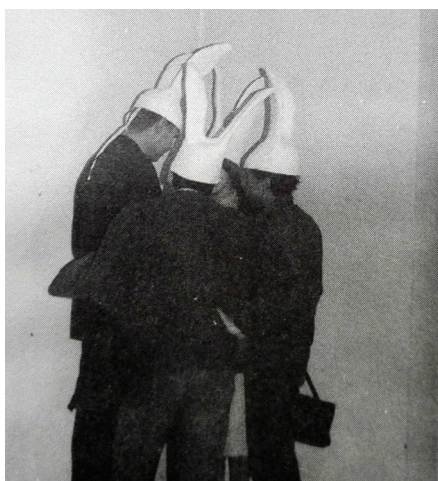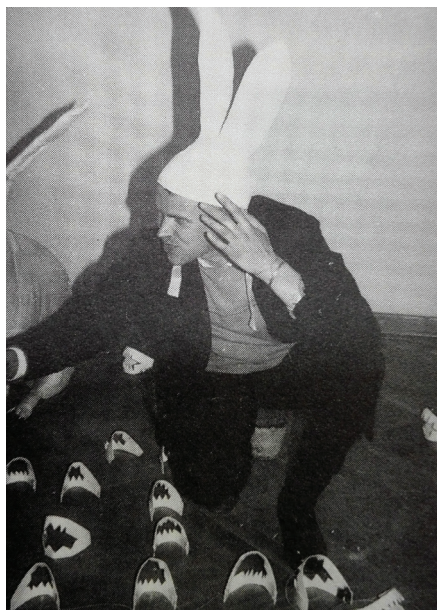
Figure 26-29. *After-Easter Show* (*Pokaz postświąteczny*), 1st of April 1986 in Gallery Wieża in Warsaw. Source: Fig. 26 & 29: Redzisz, K., & Sienkiewicz, K. (2012). *Świadomość. Neue Bieriemiennost*. Warsaw: Open Art Projects, p. 89-90; Fig 27 & 28: Alliaga, J. V. (1997). History, Death and Other Bitter Fruit. An Interpretation of the Work of Miroslaw Balka. In *Miroslaw Balka. Revision 1986-1997*. Valencia: IVAM Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, pp. 132–144. Photographer: Joanna Kiliszek.

public were selected to participate in the show and each of them was given a hat with rabbit ears (Figure 25-29). Bałka himself, playing the role of emcee, was wearing a similar headdress with two ribbons on the back resembling a papal tiara. The figure of the white rabbit was situated in the middle of the room, surrounded by flowerpots containing green shafts of new wheat – a common symbol of nature's spring awakening. The 'jaws', freshly painted white, were placed on the floor and joined together with a nylon thread. According to Rottenberg (1994), they looked rather innocent, like paper mock-ups of traps. At one point, the winners of the lottery, accompanied by the artist, started to slowly surround the public with the 'chains' of traps. The show reached its climax when Bałka opened the rabbit's mouth, illuminated from within by a red bulb, to reveal another of the metal 'jaws' resembling sharp teeth. Suddenly "the rabbit lost its Easter bunny appearance" (Rottenberg, 1994, p. 20). In the background, the Russian version of the toreador aria from Bizet's *Carmen* played loudly (Redzisz & Sienkiewicz, 2012, p. 86). While commenting on the course of the event, Rottenberg notes that "all objects used in the show were robbed of the rank of autonomous works and served as props used to play a leading part. This however, was only gradually revealed in the subsequent stages" (Rottenberg, 1994, p. 18).

The transformation from performance piece into sculpture had already gotten underway just a few weeks after the show, when what Rottenberg calls "props" were shown as a sculptural assemblage in a collective exhibition at a small-town exhibition space in eastern Poland.[169] The composition of the elements was considerably different than the arrangement presented later on for Tate. In the photograph published in the exhibition's leaflet, the rabbit is placed in the centre of a vitrine-like frame, with the 'jaws' set in a row in front of it and on the floor (Figure 32). The vitrine stands on a sort of windowsill with the window's shutters as a background. One rabbit-ear hat is suspended in front of the animal. Later on in 1997, during Bałka's solo show in Valencia some of the jaws/traps piled on a white pedestal were displayed as an autonomous work called *Untitled* (*Sin título*), 1986 (Figure 30-31).[170] In 2010 Tate

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169   Exhibition *Figures and Objects* (*Figury i przedmioty*), BWA Gallery in Puławy, April – May 1986. See: Redzisz & Sienkiewicz, 2012, p. 105.

170   Exhibition Miroslaw Balka. *Revisión 1986-1997*, 24 April – 29 July 1997, IVAM Centre del Carme, Valencia, Spain, curated by Juan Vincente Aliaga, see: Aliaga, 1997, p. 75.
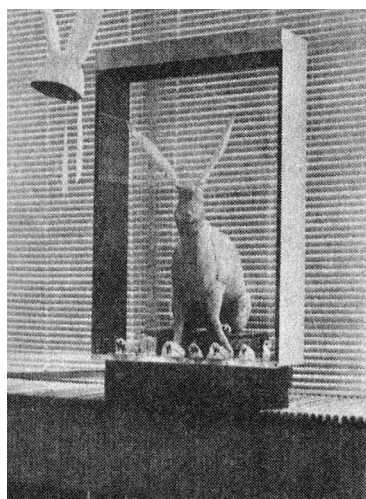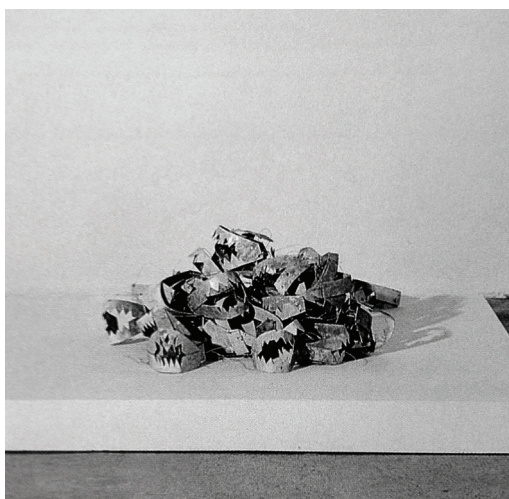
Figure 30-32. Elements from *After-Easter Show* arranged in different exhibitions. Fig 30-31: During the exhibition *Miroslaw Balka. Revision 1986-1997*, 24th of April – 29Th of July 1997, IVAM Centre del Carme, Valencia. Source: Alliaga, J. V. (1997). History, Death and Other Bitter Fruit. An Interpretation of the Work of Miroslaw Balka. In *Miroslaw Balka. Revision 1986-1997*, Valencia: IVAM Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, pp. 132–144. Fig. 33: During the exhibition *Figures and Objects (Figury i przedmioty)*, BWA Gallery in Puławy, April – May 1986; source: Redzisz, K., & Sienkiewicz, K. (2012). *Świadomość. Neue Bieriemiennost*. Warsaw: Open Art Projects, p. 105.

decided to acquire Bałka's video installation *Carrousel* (2004), and as the excerpt quoted at the opening of this subchapter mentions, the purchase was accompanied by a generous gift from the artist (Salisbury, 2010).

The history of the piece and the circumstances of its creation show that in 2010 Bałka not only revived the artwork but also reinterpreted it by creating the 'Tate version', an assemblage that had never before existed. For this new manifestation elements of the piece were arranged and photographed at the artist's studio, and images from this shoot were sent to Tate as installation instructions. Although the report of Tate curator Helen Sainsbury for the Tate acquisition committee suggests that in the collection the piece would be representing Bałka's performative work (Sainsbury, 2010), at a certain point of its career the artwork was actually 'sculpturized', ultimately entering the museum as a sculpture. As the following sections argue, this transformation, initiated by the artist himself, has been 'cemented' through institutional practices, including the artist interview.

2.4.3   Establishing an Artwork's Significant Properties through the Artist Interview

The interview was conducted by the sculpture conservator, and was audio recorded and transcribed. Although the information about its purpose is lacking – the transcript is simply entitled *Interview with Miroslaw Balka*, [...] Discussing; T13263 '*After Easter Show*', the first question posed by the conservator clarifies this issue: "So you were really wanting to talk more about what We [sic] do to this now, to the cap?" (Rolfe, 2011, p. 1).[171] As this query suggests, the main purpose of the conversation was to establish the treatment plan for the rabbit-ear hat, which was to be carried out by Tate's conservation department. It also implies that the subject of the conversation or even the encounter itself was the artist's initiative.

The conversation revolves around the materials and their use, meaning and importance, and starts with observations on the poor condition of the piece after its withdrawal from its former caretaker. Later, it moves to the renovation of the rabbit figure carried

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171   Original spelling.

out by the artist and the decisions taken during the process. Bałka describes how he removed the damaged fragments of textile, both from the inside and outside of the sculpture, and filled the inner cavities with a synthetic foam. Parts of the original stuffing, untouched by insects, were reused to patch the gaps in the animal's 'skin'. In order to make the intervention distinguishable, Bałka sewed the reconstructed parts with a new, bright white thread. In regard to the planned restoration of the hat, Bałka states clearly that although he would like it to look similarly clean to the restored rabbit, the 'patina of time' should be preserved. In addition, the possible method of stiffening the rabbit's ears and the choice of the hanging system for displaying the cap in the future are discussed meticulously. The last part of the conversation tackles the condition of the jaws and the way to visually neutralise the results of metal corrosion.

The performative origin of the piece is mentioned during the interview, but is not explored in detail. While discussing the repairs made by the artist, the conservator asks about the range of interventions in the area of the rabbit's head and ears. Bałka explains that when the animal was shown as a "kind of performance" there was "a small bulb inside the mouth, so part of the performance was that Iopened the mouth and then it was shining" (Rolfe & Bałka, 2011, p. 3). When the figure was shown later "as [a] sculpture" the bulb was continuously on, which resulted in scorch marks to the textile. Bałka had therefore decided to remove the bulb and the wiring during the restoration: "So my intervention in 2010 was that I wanted to shut his mouth and so the rabbit is silenced and doesn't say what happened to him in the past and so it was an emotional gesture" (Rolfe & Bałka, 2011, p. 4). The conservator gives a short response: "That's interesting; it gives him [sic] another level of meaning doesn't it", and then redirects the conversation back to the cleaning issues.

Following the assumption that the significant properties can be established by means of the artist interview, I scrupulously analysed the text of the transcript and listed these features of the artwork that need to be preserved in order to secure its identity. This examination was guided by my knowledge of Bałka's artistic practice, his approach to the materiality of his works and the history of the artwork as presented in the previous section. The first quality that defines the nature of the piece is the unique materials. While at the beginning of the conversation Bałka asserts that at the time the sculpture was created, he did not pay attention to the materials that he used to shape

the animal's figure, later on he speaks about the meaning and energy that they carry.[172] Although during the renovation Bałka replaced part of the figure's stuffing, he used the original matter to reconstruct the sculpture's covering. The rescue of the artwork and its reconstruction by the artist are significant gestures, both from a historical and conceptual perspective, and so the visibility of the intervention should be maintained. As he states in the interview:

> "[...] I didn't want to make a new work, [...] maybe I could make it even better, but I wanted to keep the original character and the shape of the sculpture as much as possible, and when I open [sic] the sculpture I found this element of the textile which were [sic] inside, so they were not dusted and so I decided to use it here." (Rolfe, 2011, p. 2)

As the present arrangement of the objects as well as their appearance in terms of the level of cleanliness of the surface are emphasised by Bałka several times as important, the current manifestation might be seen as a pertinent cluster of visual properties of the piece. This includes the position of the rabbit – the way it 'sits', the arrangement of the jaws and the hat, and the fact that the latter needs to be hung from a nylon thread. Within this manifestation the initial function of the art objects as performance props is represented only by the suspension of the hat at the height of Bałka's head, marking his symbolic presence in the ensemble, and the title of the piece. Nevertheless, even though the performative origin of the artwork is not discussed in the interview, should it be considered as a work-defining property as well?

2.4.4   Performance or Sculpture? The interview as part of the acquisition workflow

While Sainsbury's report for the acquisition committee states that the artwork can be shown "perhaps in combination with documentation of the performance itself" (Sainsbury, 2010, p. 1), there is no record in the archive indicating that the museum ever collected such documentation. Despite the media variability of *After-Easter Show*

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172   "At the time when I made it I didn't put too much attention what would be inside [...] and so actually all the materials I used are from this house" (Rolfe & Bałka, 2011, p. 1).

"I think that is important in my works, the emotional attitude to the materials, so materials are not just materials because of the three dimensional present [sic] but they are much more about energy and meaning which we carry [...]" (Rolfe, 2011, p. 6)
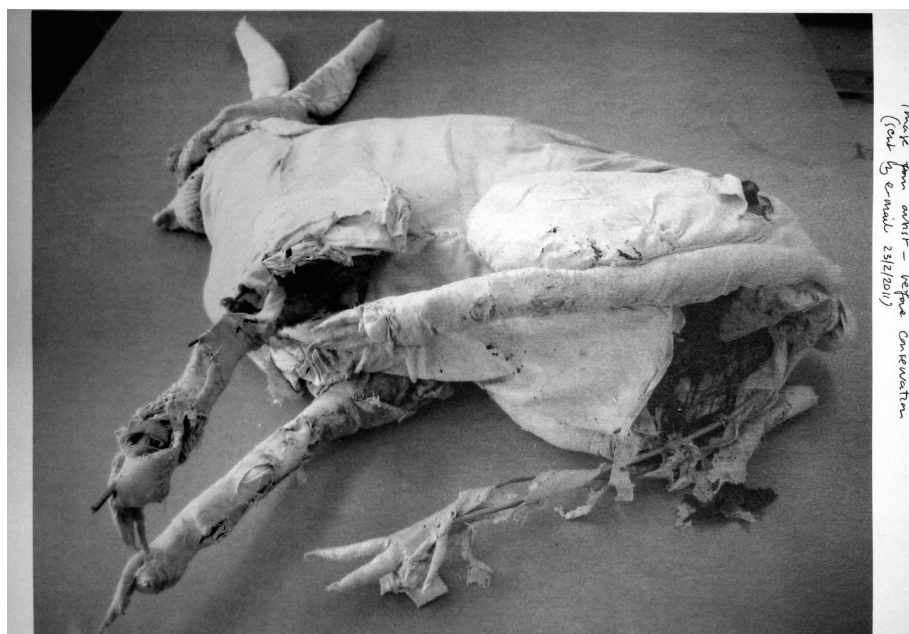
Figure 33. Mirosław Bałka, *After-Easter Show*. The figure of the rabbit before the reconstruction. Photograph sent to Tate by the artist. Source: T13263 Conservation File, Tate Archive.

(i.e. its ability to exist in at least in two different conditions, as a performance and as an autonomous sculpture), the piece was collected and studied in terms of conservation only as the latter. Why is the transformation of the artwork from performance to sculpture not commented or negotiated in any way, neither in the interview nor in the documentation of the artwork gathered by the institution? This section addresses this question by scrutinizing the Tate acquisition workflows within which artist interviews are produced, and argues that through the application of traditional classification principles reflected in the institutional structure, the museum tends to fix contemporary artworks in one particular state.

Upon its arrival at Tate, the artwork was labelled as a sculpture and as such entered the flow of acquisition procedures related to this particular medium. However, this categorisation left the performance outside the scope of conservation-related interest. For sculptures, the decision about whether it is necessary to contact the artist for conservation purposes is normally taken after the first inspection of the piece upon its arrival at the museum premises. The inspection is carried out by a conservator
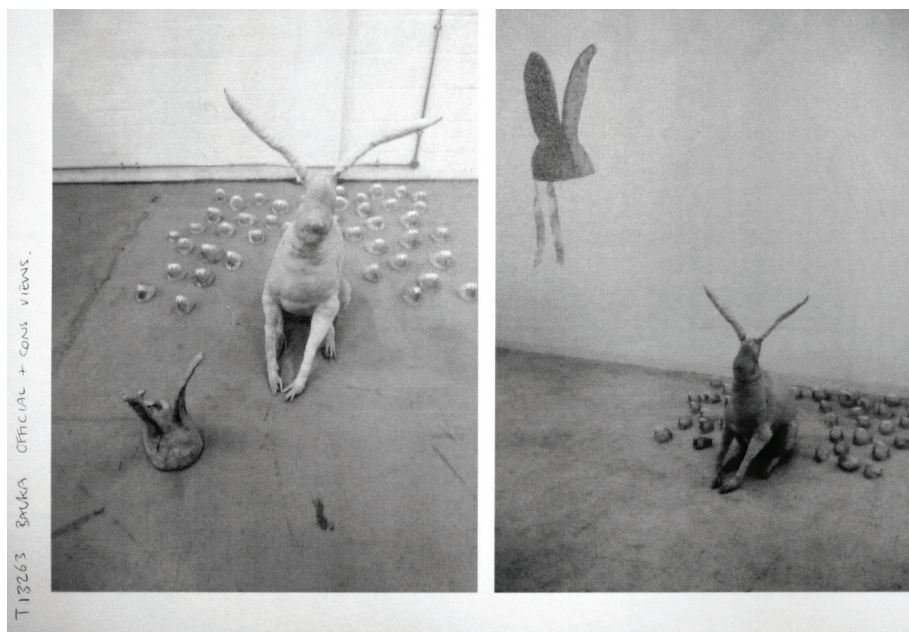
Figure 34. Mirosław Bałka, *After-Easter Show*. Installation instructions sent to Tate by the artist. Source: T13263 Conservation File, Tate Archive.

responsible for supervising acquisitions, and the decision is made on the basis of the documentation collected to date.[173] Issues to be clarified during the conversation are also identified at this stage. For *After-Easter Show*, collecting "information from the artist on how far the conservation treatment should go in repairing damage to the rabbit ear helmet" was pointed out as advisable, and this note steered the focus of all further steps (Deighton, S. (2011, February 22). Sculpture conservation pre-acquisition condition report, *T13263 Conservation File*. Tate Archive, London).

If consultation with an artist is required, she or he can be contacted by phone, or a face-to-face meeting can be arranged. Phone calls are not recorded, so the information is usually briefly summarized in the documentation. If the artist is not available for conversation, questions can also be sent in written form to intermediaries such as galleries. Face-to-face meetings are generally audio recorded, with video usually being

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173   The source of information about Tate's workflows as presented in this section is a personal interview conducted by the author with Tate conservator in January 2017. The name of the interviewee will remain anonymous in this study.

reserved for documenting an artwork's installation on display, which is also a common practice. The reason for limiting video recording is related to the availability of personnel, as it necessitates the involvement of an additional person.[174] The interview is normally conducted by a conservator, and less often is done together with the relevant curator.

Prior to the meeting, the sculpture conservator contacted Bałka by phone in a conversation that is evoked several times in the interview's transcript. Emails were also exchanged – the artist sent Tate images depicting the condition of the rabbit figure before the reconstruction and the photographic documentation representing the way the elements should be arranged on display (Figure 33-34). The transfer of images was probably accompanied by written comments; however, these were not kept in the artwork's record. As a result the images in the file were described incorrectly: those representing the desired arrangement of the elements are labelled as "official + cons views".[175] At Tate, face-to-face interviews are arranged only on an occasional basis, such that the majority of interviewees are UK-based artists. Frequently the conversation is set up ad-hoc: "Quite often you almost have to nip in and the curator might say: our conservator would like to ask you a few questions. And then you nip in and ask them things".[176] The interview with Bałka was conducted on the occasion of the artist's visit to London for the purpose of an exhibition at another venue. The transcript of the interview reveals that the interviewer was only somewhat familiar with Bałka's early artistic practice. It appears that in general at Tate the study undertaken prior to the 'regular' interview is limited to the documentation produced internally, in this case to the condition reports, images and curatorial description kept in the artwork's record.[177]

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174   Personal Interview conducted by the author with Tate conservator, January 2017. For the purpose of this research the interviewee will remain anonymous.

175   "Official view" in Tate nomenclature refers to photographs of a work from the collection that can be presented to the public, e.g. on the museum website. See: Tate photography request form, 15 February 2011, T13263 Conservation File, Tate Archive.

176   Personal Interview conducted by the author with Tate conservator, January 2017. For the purpose of this research the interviewee will remain anonymous.

177   "MB: We found a house, an abandoned house in this village about 20km from Warsaw, so it was the first time that I presented by [sic] diploma work.
MR: Sorry I don't know the history of your early work.
MB: So anyway the materials are from the house" (Rolfe, 2011, p. 2).

As a result of this closed circuit of knowledge production, the scope of the questions asked during the interview is limited, which in turn restricts the information produced during the encounter.

One of the factors to consider when analysing the workflows of large-scale museums is the standardisation and optimization of the time that the employees can dedicate to particular tasks. According to the Tate Biennial Report, in 2015 and 2016 the museum acquired approximately 1100 artworks.[178] Around 80 to 100 per year fall under the responsibility of the sculpture conservation department, which employs two conservators whose main obligation is to oversee new acquisitions, and whose duties also include communication with artists. Both work part-time, which together makes six workdays per week. Certainly, not all artworks need the same amount of attention, as they can vary from, for instance, small bronze figurines to complex installations comprising hundreds of elements. However, even if we assume that the museum employees worked the whole year without holidays, they would only be able to spend three-and-a-half days on each artwork, which in many cases might not be enough.

Besides the work overload, another factor that influences the interview's focus is the general institutional approach or museum policy in relation to collecting information from artists for conservation purposes, which for Tate is clearly framed as material-oriented.[179] Tate has a long history of interviewing artists (see: Chapter 1, p. 57) and the practice of carrying out so-called 'conservation interviews' is described in a text published on the museum website:

> "Artists have first-hand knowledge of the materials and techniques used in making their own works, and may have particular views about how their pieces should look and be displayed. Discussions with them can help to establish the acceptable parameters of display (the design of plinths, frames, projectors etc.). When the materials or techniques used in making an artwork seem potentially problematic, the artist's views on any future

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178   Tate Report 2015/2016, Appendix A, Tate Collection Acquisitions, retrieved from: http://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/103588

179   For the brief introduction to Tate's practices related to interviewing artists see: Chapter 1, p. 57.

conservation intervention can be recorded." ("Conservation interviews | Tate," n.d., para. 2) [180]

The same text informs about protocols and detailed guidelines related to interviews that have been developed by the museum, although a more specific description of these protocols has not been provided. However, during the research conducted in the institution, I was fortunate enough to be granted access to the artist-interview guidelines of Tate's sculpture conservation department.[181] In line with the excerpt from Tate's website quoted above, the guidelines focus mostly on the physical aspects of artworks, without addressing their meanings and the contexts of their creation. Even though the sculpture conservation department is responsible for all kinds of three-dimensional pieces, contemporary artworks in the form of complex installations included, the questions refer mostly to traditional sculptures. Furthermore, contrary to what the artist-interview literature advises, the guidelines consist of example questions directly addressing possible interventions, asking for instance: How far can we go in maintaining the appearance of a work? Can we repaint areas or replace corroded/ deteriorated elements?[182] In consequence, the transformation of *After-Easter Show* from a performance to a sculpture was not addressed in the interview because at the time of its acquisition it was probably not considered a conservation-related issue within the framework of sculpture conservation. Would it have been a different story if the artwork had been accessioned to the collection as a performance? Performance art acquired by Tate falls under the responsibility of the time-based media conservation department, for which liaisons with artists, their studios and supporting teams is a key task (Lewis, 2015). For artworks with intangible or ephemeral aspects, such as many time-based media artworks including performance, the conservator's role is often to help 'negotiate the artwork into the collection', or, in other words, to mediate the nature of the piece that enters the museum holdings. That does not mean that the 'sculpturalisation' of *After-Easter Show* carried out by the artist would or should be

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180   See: Conservation Interviews, Tate website, retrieved from: http://www.tate.org.uk/about/ projects/interviews-artists/conservation-interviews.

181   Bery B., *Basic interview*. Tate guides. Undated. Unpublished. Courtesy Tate. The document is lacking the date of issue, but as it was authored by an intern who worked at Tate around 2007, I assume that it is approximately a decade old.

182   Bery B., Ibid.

reversed, but its performative past would be potentially acknowledged, documented and perhaps even integrated into the collection through the purchase of the existing documentation.[183] Also, the way this performative side should be preserved by the museum might be negotiated with the artist, possibly through an artist interview, which might follow a completely different course than the one carried out by the sculpture conservator, and therefore offering another cluster of 'significant properties'.

2.4.5   Properties that were Significant in the Past may Become Significant in the Future

There are several interpretations of *After-Easter Show* as a performance, but I will return once again to Sainsbury's report, which reads:

> "Balka's performative works often took the form of some kind of game or ritual played out at the opening of an exhibition. Intended to trigger the imagination and often improvised, the final results were unpredictable. Much of the work from the 1980s relates to Balka's own experiences growing up in Poland under martial law and the oppression of Catholicism under the Russian regime. Balka felt that the church was often seen as the only challenger to Russian oppression, and that secular resistance was largely overlooked. Balka felt that real opposition was to take care of one's own life and behaviour, whereas religion only offered another set of rules. Sitting meekly at the start of the performance the Easter bunny may be seen as a sacrificial lamb, yet the sinister revelations of the finale suggest that this victim might also be capable of menace itself, maybe even in turn becoming the oppressor." (Sainsbury, 2010, p.2)

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183   The photographic documentation of the event is rather scarce and dispersed. There are some images in the artist's private archive, although the copyrights probably belong to other people involved in the performance, both the organizers and the public. Joanna Kiliszek, curator of the 1986 show, recalled in an interview conducted by the author that ephemerality was a part of the event: "We just did not document anything, what is left is just the dates and some photos made by friends, or pictures I took myself, black and white and nothing else. [...] And this transience was intrinsic to the whole idea, which of course from a contemporary perspective is a big loss because it just stays in the memory of people, and memory is completely elusive. We did not publish catalogues either". (J. Kiliszek, in-person interview, January 16, 2017. Translated from the Polish by the author.)

Are these meanings still perceptible after the artwork's transformation into a sculptural assemblage? One of the key elements currently missing is the eerie metamorphosis of the rabbit. In the photograph of the work available on the Tate website, the animal looks almost pitiful, with its mouth closed in an eerie smile. If the artwork could be classified as both the sculptural assemblage and the representation of the performance, it could theoretically be displayed in both ways. When shown as a performance, the elements could be arranged according to and/or together with historical documentation, accompanied by the flowerpots, the missing rabbit-ear caps and the Russian version of the Toreador Song played over loudspeakers.[184] The future museum and the future public might one day be interested in re-enacting the performance itself. If the re-opening of the rabbit's mouth and the re-insertion of the red bulb were not an option due to the fragility of the original materials and the importance of the artist's reconstruction considered as an artist's decision, it could be conceivably carried out with exhibition copies produced for this purpose. The different manifestations of the artwork – the performative one and the sculptural reinterpretation – could co-exist in the museum collection. Decisions on displaying the work in one way or another might be taken on the basis of different clusters of significant properties that, while offering divergent narratives, are in my view equally justifiable.

It is true that the concept of 'significant properties' might be seen as a useful reference to identify what features best secure the artwork's perpetuation, and, likewise, the artist interview is a source that might support the recognition of these features. However, the story of *After-Easter Show* has demonstrated that both tools should be used with caution. Although the recent scholarship recognizes the multi-levelled subjectivity of the information produced during the interview and the negotiated and interpretative nature of documentation as such (see: Chapter 1, p. 52 and p. 72), the assumption persists that there is a single, authoritative constellation of significant properties of each artwork at any given moment. Nevertheless, the properties that are significant for the artist may shift over time, and might differ from those that a curator,

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184   A good example of a performance converted into an installation is *Quadrille* (1975/2013) by Rose English, also in the Tate collection (see: https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/english-quadrille-t14673). In this case the origin of the current manifestation is reflected not only through the displayed visual documentation, but also by the two dates given for its creation – one for the performance and another for the installation.

a sculpture conservator, a time-based media conservator or an audience member might regard as essential to the artwork. Moreover, the values associated with these roles are not monolithic, and it is possible for an individual to identify diverse clusters of significant properties. These clusters may even be mutually exclusive, depending on the individual's ability to acknowledge and embrace other values or perspectives. Therefore, the artist interview seen as a source should not stand alone as the foundation of the work-defining properties, whose process of identification must include the scope of all the artwork's meanings acquired throughout its career and diverse constellations of features significant at its different stages. This multiplicity of required references points to the importance of artwork-related documentation and emphasises the need to render it not only interdisciplinary but also open-ended.

The collaboration between Bałka and Tate on the restoration of *After-Easter Show*, praised by the artist during our conversation, never reached its stated goal – the actual treatment of the hat discussed in the interview has not been performed. Since its accession to the Tate collection the artwork has remained in storage, and so the restoration of the cap has yet to become a priority for the museum's conservators.[185] When the time is right and the museum decides to put *After-Easter Show* on public display, not only will the treatment become necessary, but also the contextualisation of the artwork, and its location within the art historical discourse or narrative of a particular show. That may trigger the need to complete the information about the performance that is lacking in the archive, therefore necessitating additional research. One may hope that when that time comes the artist will still be available for further collaboration.

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185   Personal Interview conducted by the author with Tate conservator, January 2017. For the purpose of this research the interviewee will remain anonymous.

2.5   Summary of the First Phase of the Research: Paving the way for further investigation

2.5.1   Sanctions, Properties and Meanings: Conclusions

The applied methodology of theoretical sampling has involved a critical reflection on the three theoretical categories selected for examination: artwork's meanings, artist's sanctions and artwork's significant properties, all tested as potential references for conservation decision making. In a departure from the premise of a single meaning, the study has exhibited the polysemy of contemporary artworks, and divided their meanings into two categories: firstly, those established fully or partially by the artist, and secondly, those generated without the artist's direct involvement and beyond her or his control. Meanings from both clusters are subjectively constructed entities and the process of meaning making is creative by nature. In consequence, the conservation strategies must not be built on one meaning but consider the synergy of meanings that occurs at the intersection of the two categories. Because of their subjective nature, meanings as a reference in conservation decision making need to be accompanied by contextual information indicating how these meanings were produced. The second part of the investigation has revealed that the artist's sanctions, although seemingly indisputable, concrete actions, can also be ambiguous and contradictory and, as such, subject to different interpretations. Therefore, a singular sanction established by the artist must not be seen as the ultimate reference for steering an artwork's perpetuation, but analysed within the sequence of events that constitute the artwork's career. The third notion, work-defining properties, is contingent on the individual and his or her particular approach to the artwork in question, as well as the stage of the artwork's career in which they are established. In other words, each of the artwork's stakeholders may isolate a different set of significant properties. Features that have been significant in the past might regain their relevance in the future, whether or not they lose importance at a given moment. By establishing one set of significant properties, the museum, in its authority as the artwork's keeper, might fix an inherently changeable contemporary artwork in a single state, a process that could become irreversible once the author ceases to be available.

Despite all of these critical reflections, the three notions are useful tools in establishing points of reference for developing conservation strategies, but need to be used thoughtfully. Caretakers should have the capacity to recognise the complexity of contemporary artworks and be aware of the fact that their choices may permanently limit this complexity. As I argue in Chapter 1, one of the ways to grasp the multifarious nature of a contemporary artwork is by testing it against the potential features established in the previous chapter: its conceptuality, contextuality, processuality, and media-variability (see: Chapter 1, p. 36).

The notions of artwork's meanings, artist's sanctions and work-defining properties are interrelated and dependent on each other. Meanings, both those established or sanctioned by the artist as well as those shaped by the context, might act as factors for determining significant properties. An artist's sanctions establish features pointing to potential interpretations and thus meanings of the piece. The significant properties of a piece might be identified based on the analysis of the artwork's meanings and artist's sanctions, and by contextualising these against the background of the artwork's history and the context in which the artist's sanctions were delivered and artwork's meanings were established. All these notions are dependent on individual perspectives, judgements or interpretations, and this subjectivity manifests itself on multiple levels.

2.5.2 From Interview to Documentation: Developing a conceptual approach to the uses of the artist interview

What have these case studies shown us about how to implement novel contemporary-art conservation strategies in a museum setting? In the specific case of the artist interview, what we have seen is that, while it is a suitable tool for gathering stories about the artwork and a reliable source as to the artwork's meanings, artist's sanctions and work-defining properties, the method's potential is not fully exploited in the institutional setting, mostly due to insufficient resources. In the case of *Black Pope, Black Sheep*, the artist interview with Bałka was a pilot project and a one-time occurrence. Although the original intention was to share the interview on the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw's website, to this day this goal has yet to be accomplished. At the end of 2015 I left the museum to take on a doctoral position at the University of Amsterdam, and the only interview-related work that the museum performed after my

departure was to commission the transcription of the video recording. The Collection Documentation Programme has been abandoned due to a lack of time and resources.[186] As for *211x179x125, 190x129x73*, although the research reveals that at present the information collected by the Kröller-Müller Museum regarding the artwork's possible futures in not sufficient for informed decision making and needs to be expanded further in collaboration with the artist, the museum has postponed establishing a long-term strategy for its conservation until the piece's next installation. Again, the main reason for this is time and resources, as the museum has other priorities to deal with on the day-to-day basis. The case study investigated at Tate, in turn, has shown that the artist interview, although conducted around the time of the acquisition, nevertheless failed to consider the performative origins of the collected artwork, as well as the essential changes that the artwork underwent during its career. Instead, it was focused on collecting factual information related to the material composition of the piece and the technical issues to be faced during the forthcoming treatment. The conversation was shaped by the scope of the preparatory research, limited, due to time-constrains, to the internally produced documentation. It is important to note here that this is not a an isolated case, as museums everywhere struggle to achieve the support – financial and otherwise – that they need in order to carry out their work with the rigor that they themselves would like.

Although in the course of this chapter the artist interview has been confirmed as a source of artwork's meanings, artist's sanctions and work-defining properties, the case studies have also made clear that other sources – such as the correspondence between the artist and the museum or the report written by Kerckhove – fulfil this purpose as well. In all source types, information might be filtered through the participants' memories and their understanding of the facts, and so when used is subject to interpretation. The interview has its own dependencies, for instance the communication skills of a particular artist, the scope of the research conducted beforehand, the selection and

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186   The institution is facing permanent problems with space – until now all the venues and storage spaces have had a temporary character and therefore all systematic work related to documentation of the collection has been postponed until this condition changes. The museum is currently involved in the construction of a new, permanent building which is scheduled to open in 2022.

sequence of the questions to ask, etc. As such, the artist interview as a method for collecting references and a source thereof for conservation decision making needs to be embedded in and contrasted with other types of documents related to the artwork.

The shape of the artist interview relies on circumstances and conventions governing the setting in which it was conducted. Both interviews presented in this chapter – the first regarding *Black Pope, Black Sheep* and the second *After-Easter Show* – were conducted by museum conservators. They refer to formally similar artworks from the oeuvre of one artist, created in the same period. And yet, the two interviews happened under different circumstances, and that is clearly reflected in the outcome. The first one, in Warsaw, had a more holistic character and, although focused on issues related to the materiality of the piece, also addressed the circumstances and context of its creation, its exhibition history and its interpretations – all of which may influence the understanding of the piece's materiality. The aim of the second interview, at Tate, was to resolve a particular conservation-related problem that needed to be dealt with in the near future. In the first case, the conversation with the artist was a pilot case study in a larger project that the institution was planning to launch. It was also the first artist interview conducted in this particular museum and as such was granted all the necessary time and means. In the second case, the interview was a part of the everyday museum workflow, subjected to restrictions of time and means. But despite these major differences, both fit into the definition of the artist interview presented in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, and both have a value as a reference for making certain decisions about the artworks' future.

The examination of artwork's meanings, artist's sanctions and artwork's significant properties in the framework of real-life case studies has exposed two main sites of tension that influence the use of the artist interview in museum settings and make contemporary art a perennial challenge for museums. The first one is the persistent object-oriented character of art institutions and the traditional, medium-based classification principles that they apply to the collected artworks, which contradicts the characteristics of contemporary art as outlined at the beginning of this book (see: Chapter 1, p. 36). As the study presented in this chapter has shown, an artwork's identity is distributed between the art object and the stories produced during its career, and these stories are recorded in artwork-related documentation. Upon

acquisition, through the application of traditional classification principles museums divide the artwork between the collection and documentation. The collected part is usually one or several art objects, which are subsequently categorised by medium, checked in terms of completeness and condition, and eventually put on display or deposited in the museum storage. The documentation, on the other hand, usually belongs to the museum archive.[187] Its examination and care is more time consuming as it involves research, rarely a priority for institutions, and not regarded as indispensable for an artwork's conservation. As a consequence of the classification systems in place, different conservation measures are applied to different carriers of an artwork's identity, depending on the extent to which they fit into the traditional concept of the autonomous work of art.

The second site of tension is the relationship between artists and institutions. Whereas the conservation scholarship acknowledges that the artist's wishes regarding the future of their piece are not always to be taken for granted but rather critically evaluated and negotiated, in day-to-day reality the artist is seen as the supreme authority over her or his work. On the one hand, the status of the artist and his or her relationship with collecting institutions has shifted in important ways over the last half century, and this phenomenon is bound up with the development of new artistic practices such as conceptual art, site-specificity and institutional critique.[188] The new kind of collaboration between artists and museums implies that the artwork often emerges

187   There are some remarkable exceptions to this rule. In the case of artworks that lack fixed material representation, museums sometimes accession documentation to the collection as a musealium. An example of such a practice has been described by Sanneke Stigter in her doctoral dissertation (Stigter, 2016). She describes how in 2007 the Kröller-Müller Museum acquired a piece by Jan Dibbets, *All shadows that occurred to me in .... are marked with tape* (1969), which consists of lines of masking tape marking sunlit areas on the walls and floor of the gallery. Its appearance depends on the conditions of the space and it needs to be installed anew for each display. What the museum accessioned to its collection were documents – for example the invoice has been catalogued as a certificate with the inventory number KM 131.363 while the rest of the documentation is classified under the number KM 131.364. Both were specified as "related objects to the artwork" (Stigter, 2016, p. 198).

188   Site-specificity and associated strategies of institutional critique are related to the activism that led to the foundation of the Art Workers Coalition in New York in 1969. Its key demands were incorporated in the "Artists' Reserved Rights Transfer and Sale Agreement" drafted by Robert Projansky and Seth Siegelaub, which grants artists control over where and how their works would be exhibited and reproduced (Bismarck et al., 2017, p. 108).

from a process of negotiation that blurs distinctions between artist, curator, conservator, historian, and even museum lawyer (Bismarck, Munder, & Schneemann, 2017, p. 108). On the other hand, many collaborations between artists and museums are still underpinned by a Romantic paradigm of creative genius, which is not only deeply rooted in Western tradition but also congruent with the structure of the art market (Zolberg, 1992). The second tendency appears between the lines of the sections of this chapter, as in all cases the range of actual negotiation of the artwork's shape with Bałka was rather limited. Although the creative process in contemporary art might be complex and more akin to the production of a feature film than an autonomous discrete object, the artist is still considered as a creator rather than originator or initiator in need of collaboration with facilitators. Moreover, both sides often accept this traditional vision, because it simplifies certain aspects of communication and might benefit both sides – artists keep their right to decide while institutions may easily rely on their decisions.

As a consequence of these observations, three focal points have been established, aimed at guiding the next part of the book: the empirical investigation. The first one is the artwork-related documentation in the museum – the way it is conceptualised, structured and used may impact the artwork's possible futures. The second one is the internal structure and practices of a particular museum related to collection care – how they mimic traditional classification principles and how this influences the continuation of a contemporary artwork. The third one is collaboration with artists regarding artworks collected – how it is instigated, encouraged, nurtured, steered and documented in art museums.

The first phase of the research has allowed for the recognition of a complex network of interrelations and dependencies between the three key concepts that might be used as a reference in conservation-related decision making, and has proven the artist interview to be a valid method for their identification and documentation. However, it has also demonstrated that decisions regarding an artwork's possible futures can be based only on an informed selection of these references. The longer the history of an artwork and the more information available, the more combinations of references can be made. Consequently, there is no single option but numerous informed conceivable decisions that can be made.

This conclusion proves the pertinence of the model of artwork-related documentation as a host for an artwork's identity, conceptualised in the first chapter of this dissertation as a set whose elements produce knowledge through mutual interaction (see: Chapter 1, p. 74). Thanks to its non-hierarchical structure, all the elements are of equal importance. Selected components, here called stories, can be classified as carriers of an artwork's meanings. Some are sanctioned by an artist, while others belong to further categories that may be assigned to the content of the set. In all the case studies the information from both the artist and the other sources is incomplete. While these deficiencies have been identified and indicated, it has been shown that each piece of information that enters the set by interacting with existing data fosters new queries to address, an observation which verifies the presumed openness of the set. However, if the conservation decision can be built only on the selection of the constituents, the question arises as to how to make an informed choice. Can artist interviews help conservators with this issue? At this point of the study the interview within the set of artwork-related documentation is just one of many facilitators of knowledge production. Does it have any other uses? What further interrelations are there between the documentation and the interview? Departing from the focal points identified earlier on and following the case-study approach, the next part of the research investigates these issues further through fieldwork conducted in two art museums – the Statens Museum for Kunst in Copenhagen and the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam.

Chapter 3

Danh Vo's 'Chandeliers Project': "For any future exhibition of the piece, please contact the artist"

Forensics is, of course, not simply about science but also about the presentation of scientific findings, about science as an art of persuasion. Derived from the Latin *forensis*, the word's root refers to the "forum", and thus to the practices and skill of making an argument before a professional, political or legal gathering. In classical rhetoric, one such skill involved having objects address the forum. Because they do not speak for themselves, there is a need for a translation, mediation, interpretation between the 'language of things' and that of people. This involves the trope of *prosopopeia* – the figure in which a speaker artificially endows inanimate objects with a voice. [...] Forensics involves, then, a relation between three components: an object, a mediator and a forum [...]."
(Weizman & Keenan, 2012, pp. 28–29)

It is worth considering [...] whether artists talking about their work is not a thoroughly viable and particularly non-reifying way for art to appear in the world – including object-based work. Isn't it invariably more stimulating to hear artists present their work than to have to go and look at their exhibitions?
(Wright, 2013, pp. 42–43)

3.1   Introduction: Art museums as museums of objects

Museums place the present in dialogue with the past by preserving and displaying objects from different periods with different values and meanings attached to them, and the collection of objects is central to the museum's identity (Funcke, 2017). However, this interaction between museums and objects does not have to be seen as unidirectional. As shown by cultural sociologist Fernando Domínguez Rubio (2014), conventional artworks that exist as contained objects, with their specific physical

properties, have shaped the art museum through the ages, determining its structure, infrastructure, practices related to collection care and, above all, its classification strategies. The latter constitutes a crucial process whereby institutions, in this case museums, by standardising and synchronising actions across different areas, are able to function in an organised way (Domínguez Rubio, 2014). Many of the museum's features modelled by the objecthood of its collection are hardly applicable to contemporary artworks, where objects might play an auxiliary role or even be entirely absent. Despite this, art museums, even those collecting contemporary art, still operate as "objectification machines" (Domínguez Rubio, 2014) that strive to transform and stabilise artworks as objects that can be exhibited, circulated, and classified, and often 'force' contemporary artworks to fit into their object-based rules and structures.

Following Domínguez Rubio's perspective, this chapter aims to demonstrate that since objects perform a distinct function in contemporary art than in traditional art, the conventional classification principles and strategies of art museums are not sustainable when applied to contemporary artwork. Moreover, it shows how the endeavour to render contemporary works of art classifiable according to traditional principles can potentially affect their conservation. The argument unfolds around the motif of the artist's stories that actively sanction aspects of an artwork, but also passively end up carrying the bulk of its identity. It demonstrates such stories' importance for guiding an artwork's reading and in consequence for informing conservation-related decision making, and looks at how these immaterial components of artworks are represented in the institutional infrastructure related to the collection. It also scrutinises the hierarchy and power dynamics in relationships between an artist and different institutions, and demonstrates how these influence the presentation strategies the different keepers devise for artworks in their collections.

The starting point of this chapter is the notion of 'artwork constituency' as introduced by Domínguez Rubio for the purpose of his research. The term was developed based on the observation that artworks usually enter museums not as a single 'object' but as a part of what he calls a 'constituency', which consists of all the elements that are acquired together with the artwork. They range from frames and vitrines to documents like contracts, installation instructions or artist notes. While Domínguez Rubio defines the 'artwork constituency' as composed of physical items, this chapter uses an

expanded variation on this term that dispenses with tangibility as a required feature. Here the 'artwork constituency' is understood as all information meaningful for an artwork's identity that is gathered and produced around the process of acquisition for the museum collection. This modification aside, Domínguez Rubio's stance that all these items "define the boundaries of the artwork and establish their meaning and value", such that an artwork is in fact "inseparable from its constituency" (Domínguez Rubio, 2014, p. 628), is fully applicable.

The first operation before accessioning the artwork into the museum's inventory is to classify its components and distribute them among various physical locations and, more importantly, among value-based categories that separate the 'art' from the 'non-art' (Domínguez Rubio, 2014). The classification principle has traditionally been the 'aesthetic value' that characterises artworks, and those elements of the 'artwork constituency' that possess this value become a part of the museum collection, falling under the supervision of curators and conservators. Those that have been classified as 'non-art', but recognised to bear other values, such as research or legal value, are often placed in the museum archives, managed by archivists.[189] The artwork's ability to be classified and translated into the museum's standards is crucial in order for it to be included in the processes related to the circulation of information and coordination of inter-institutional actions. According to Domínguez Rubio, this categorisation emerged partly thanks to the physical properties of conventional artworks understood as objects – especially paintings. As a result, the categories have proved controversial in the case of other less object-centred artworks, in particular contemporary artworks.

These processes of classification and valorisation are explained and analysed here through the example of the work of Danish artist Danh Vo, as collected by three large-scale museums. The case study is structured in three parts: firstly, in order to contextualise the investigation, the artist, his practice and the artwork are introduced in detail; secondly, both are located and analysed within the framework of museum practices; and thirdly, the data gathered and the analysis conducted are summarised

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189   Usually archivists are employed only by large-scale institutions. In small museums there might be no separate position created for this purpose. More information about the structure of museum archives is featured in Chapter 5.

and assessed. The first section presents the investigation into the nature of the artwork in question, as its origin and entangled career offer insights into Vo's artistic approaches that contextualise the piece. The section then goes on to present a group of the artist's stories that reveal the artwork's complexity and competing meanings. The second section starts by examining the artwork as the 'object of conservation' and by identifying its potential 'artwork constituency'. It then moves on to present the collection-related documentation infrastructure of each of the museums, describing their relationship and collaboration with the artist, and ends with an analysis of their strategies applied to the artwork as a collectable. The third part theorises on the empirical findings and discusses their implications. This investigation proves that artists' stories shape the identity of contemporary artworks and enable them to be understood, and as such it is equally important for museums to collect, care for and conserve them as it is for the art objects proper. Accordingly, the chapter proposes that a shift in the significance, value, and therefore status of artwork-related documentation within the museum structure is key for the successful conservation of contemporary artworks. Furthermore, it suggests that this can be accomplished by including the artwork's documentation alongside the art object in the museum collection.

3.2   Artists' Stories, Artworks' Stories: Intertwined carriers and the notion of project

One of the keys for interpreting Vo's art is his tangled life story. Danh Vo (1975) spent his early childhood on the Vietnamese island of Phu Quoc where his family of South Vietnamese origin was brought due to the advance of the armies of the North.[190] After the fall of Saigon, Vo's family fled Vietnam on a boat built by the artist's father (McDonough, 2016). While attempting to reach America, they were rescued by a Danish cargo ship and sent to a refugee camp in Singapore. Vo's family applied for

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190   While commenting on the role of Vo's personal stories in his work, art critic Nora Taylor (2012) points at the similarities to Beuys's accounts on his Crimean adventure (see: Chapter 2, p. 94). When asked about the use of these stories as a kind of mythology parallel to that of Beuys, he responded: "I think that whether or not I used my biography in my work, my work would be read in relation to my personal history, so I anticipated this when I wove it into my work. Beuys created his story and then made work out of it, that is one difference between our practices" (Chaillou, 201, para. 16).

asylum in Denmark, where the artist grew up and started his art studies (Taylor, 2012). However, the beginnings of his artistic career are to be found in Germany, where he continued his education, had his first exhibition and finally set up his studio.[191] Nowadays, Vo sees himself "as a container that has inherited these infinite traces of history without inheriting any direction" (Robecchi, 2012, para. 2), and each of his available biographies refers to a different current place of residence, from Basel to New York and Mexico City.[192]

To help us approach works of art in line with the definition of contemporary art provided in Chapter 1 (see: p. 25) – i.e. as one complex entity represented by different art objects – this section introduces the notion of the 'art project' understood as one of the contemporary strategies in art making. Although, as Claire Bishop has remarked, the term 'project' was in use among conceptual artists already in the late 1960s, back then it was mostly understood in a similar way to in architecture: as a proposal for

Figure 35. Danh Vo, *08:03:51, 28.05.2009*. Installation view of the exhibition *Where the Lions Are* at Kunsthalle Basel. Photographer: unknown. Retrieved from: https://bortolozzi.com/exhibitions/danh-vo-where-the-lions-are-kunsthalle-basel/.

an artwork (Bishop, 2012). However, since the 1990s art projects slowly developed into an art form in their own right and started to replace the work of art as a finite object with an "open-ended, post-studio, research-based, social process, extending over time and mutable in form" (Bishop, 2012, p. 194). As Johnnie Gratton and Mark Sheringham observe in the introductory essay to their study on French contemporary art, in many projects the process is related to a strong investigative impulse reflecting concerns of a sociological or anthropological nature. Such projects, in line with the notion of 'ethnographic turn' as coined by Hal Foster, consist of site-specific (or site-sensitive) cultural research projects that "shift our attention from art to life, from the

191   For more details on Vo's biography see e.g.: Brinson, 2018; McDonough, 2016.

192   For Switzerland see: Robecchi, 2012, para. 2; for New York see: http://www.peeruk.org/danh-vo/; for Mexico see: http://www.kurimanzutto.com/en/artists/danh-vo.
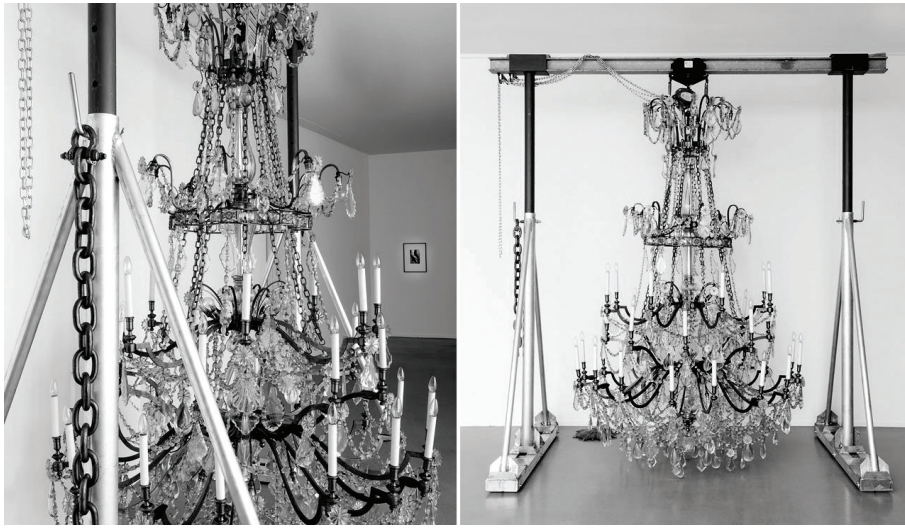
Figure 36. Danh Vo, *08:03:51, 28.05.2009*. Installation view of the exhibition *Go Mo Ni Ma Da* at Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. Photographer: Pierre Antoine. Retrieved from: https://www.wmagazine.com/gallery/danh-vo-chandeliers/all.

aesthetic to the extra-aesthetic, and from the personal to the collective" (Gratton & Sheringham, 2005, p. 2).[193] The result made available to the viewer is often an account or record of the course of the project, a material confirmation of the project as a process. Its end (or side) product is not dependent on the successfulness of the project; it can represent its failure or unpredicted development. Furthermore, the final outcome may be less important than the process itself, as the project is "a device designed not to achieve a particular end, but to allow something unforeseen to happen" (Gratton & Sheringham, 2005). Although by nature the term 'project' is linked to the present and oriented towards the future, it may be used to describe a completed undertaking. However, to apply this term retrospectively it is necessary to recognise within its outcome the trace of a now-past present and now-past future. It is also important to acknowledge that many final products are not actually final, but 'works in progress', as the result is, above all, 'the project' (Gratton & Sheringham, 2005).

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193   The term 'ethnographic turn' was coined in art criticism and art history in reference to Hal Foster's seminal essay *The artist as ethnographer?*, in which he speaks about contemporary artistic practices that exhibit significant similarities with anthropology and ethnographic research in the way they theorise cultural dissimilarities and issues of representation (Rutten, van Dienderen, & Soetaert, 2013). See: Foster, 1995.

The art project that resulted in the artwork presented in this chapter was carried out mostly during the five-month residency that Vo carried out at Kadist Art Foundation in Paris in 2009, and consists of the arrangement of a loan and later purchase of chandeliers from a Parisian hotel originally called the Hôtel Majestic.[194] The setting as the site of competing memories is key to the concept of the piece. The hotel opened in 1908 but was only used for its original function until 1936, when the French government acquired it and transformed it into the offices of the French Ministry of Defence. During the Nazi occupation of Paris, it served as the centre of operations of the high command of the German Military Administration, and in that period it witnessed the planning of the mass killing of Parisian Jews, as well as preparations for the assassination of Hitler.[195] After the war, the former hotel hosted the headquarters of UNESCO, before it was again transformed into the International Conference Centre of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. During that period the former ballroom was used as a site for negotiating peace treaties in many international conflicts, including the Paris Peace Accords, and subsequently the

Figure 38. Danh Vo, *08:03:51, 28.05.2009*. Installation view of the exhibition *Slip of the Tongue* at Punta della Dogana, Venice, 2015. Courtesy: Palazzina Grassi, Venice; Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne; kurimanzutto, Mexico City. Photo: Matteo De Fina. Retrieved from: http://moussemagazine.it/raysse-slip-tongue-venice-2015/.

Figure 37. Danh Vo, *08:03:51, 28.05.2009* (2009). Installation view at National Gallery of Denmark. SMK Photo/Jakob Skou-Hansen. Courtesy Statens Museum for Kunst, Denmark.

194   Kadist is a non-profit contemporary art organization with an international contemporary art collection that hosts artist's residencies and produces exhibitions, publications, and public events. It has two locations, one in Paris and one in San Francisco. For more information see: http://kadist.org/about/.

195   For more information on the history of the Hôtel Majestic during World War II see: Gaël Eismann, Hôtel Majestic: Ordre et sécurité en France occupée (1940-1944), Paris, Tallandier, 2010, p. 592.

Figure 39. Danh Vo, *08:03:51,
28.05.2009*. Installation view of the
exhibition الحجارة وادي at Museo Jumex,
Mexico City. Photo : Abigail Enzaldo
and Emilio Bernabé García. Courtesy
Museo Jumex, Mexico City. Retrieved
from: http://moussemagazine.it/danhvo_
abrahmcruzvillegas_fundacionjumex_
mexicocity2014/.

nine-point plan aimed at guaranteeing lasting peace in Vietnam in 1973, as well as peace consultations over Kosovo and the Ivory Coast (Lebovici, 2015).

Bearing in mind Vo's family history, one can assume that the event that attracted the artist's attention to the former Hôtel Majestic was the signing of the documents that were supposed to conclude the Vietnam War. Vo recalls the moment he first saw photographs of the setting of these peace negotiations in a letter published in the press release of the first presentation of the piece: "In the photo there were people sitting in a circle, like in an arena, discussing the future of Vietnam. Above the arena, the chandeliers of the ballroom were hanging and lighting up the negotiation table" (Kadist Art Foundation, 2009, p. 3). The year before the start of Vo's residency in Paris, the French government sold the former Hôtel Majestic to a private investor who started a general refurbishment of the building, which allowed Vo first to borrow and later to buy the chandeliers and subsequently convert them into an artwork. The chandeliers purchased from the new owner of the historic building were assigned separate titles.[196] The first one, entitled *16:32:15–26.05.2009,* was displayed at the end of Vo's residency at Kadist Art Foundation's exhibition space.[197] A couple of months later the second one, *08:03:51, 28.05.2009,* was presented as a part of Vo's solo exhibition in Basel.[198] The fall of

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196   In fact, a total of four chandeliers were purchased. As this dissertation pertains strictly to the framework of museum practices, the fourth chandelier, originating from a space adjacent to the ballroom and sold to a private collector (Ishikawa Foundation), will be left outside the scope of the research.

197   Exhibition *Les Fleurs d'intérieur*, 30 May – 19 July 2009, Kadist Art Foundation, Paris. For more information about the show see: *"Les fleurs d'intérieur": Danh Vo's exhibition press release*, 2009.

198   Exhibition *Where the Lions Are*, 11 June – 23 August 2009, Kunsthalle Basel. For more information about the show see: *Danh Vo: Where the Lions Are*. Retrieved December 21, 2017, from http://www.kunsthallebasel.ch/en/exhibition/where-the-lions-are-2/

2009 witnessed the display of the third one, 26.05.2009, 8:43, this time in Berlin.[199] By the time my own research began, all three chandeliers had been purchased by or donated to the collections of major museums: Centre Pompidou, Denmark's Statens Museum for Kunst (SMK) and MoMA.[200] Building on the distinction between the artwork and the art object, and in reference to the notion of the art project as presented above, in this chapter the artwork that resulted from the art project will be called the 'Chandeliers Project', while each of the three chandeliers will be referred to by its title. Technically speaking, all three artefacts are classic late-19th-century brass chandeliers decorated with glass chains and prisms. They were designed from the outset to be electrified; therefore, instead of candles, they are equipped with incandescent bulbs mounted on so-called 'candle tubes' made of compressed cardboard painted white. The chandeliers' dimensions vary – the originally central one is the largest and most complex in terms of decoration, while the two side ones are considerably smaller.

While conceived less than a decade ago, Vo's 'Chandeliers Project' has already been presented in numerous exhibition spaces and in a variety of different ways. This variability of installation options raises questions regarding strategies for future display and, accordingly, presents conservation challenges that will be introduced in the following section. Between 2009 and 2016 each of the three chandeliers was exhibited in multiple shows and venues.[201] The largest one, entitled *08:03:51, 28.05.2009* and acquired later on by SMK, was shown for the first time hanging from the ceiling in the very centre of a vast, nearly empty exhibition hall of the Kunsthalle Basel (Figure 35).[202] While the light bulbs were not switched on, the sunlight filtering into the room through the glass roof and reflecting off the prisms as they swayed with the space's air

199   Exhibition *Preis der Nationalgalerie für junge Kunst*, 11 September 2009 – 3 January 2010, Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin. For more information about the show see: Preis der Nationalgalerie für junge Kunst 2009. Retrieved December 21, 2017, from: http:// preisdernationalgalerie.de/en/preis-der-nationalgalerie-fuer-junge-kunst-2009/

200   There are discrepancies between the way the titles of the chandeliers are written out, even within a single institution. While on the MoMA website the chandelier is tilted *08:43, 26.05 (2009)*, in the Object File it is identified as *26.05.2009, 8:43*. For the purpose of this text, I have chosen to use the titles according to the official documentation of each of the museums.

201   The empirical part of this research ended in 2017. In 2018 there were two subsequent exhibitions featuring the chandeliers, which will not be analysed in this study.

202   Ibidem, Exhibition *Where the Lions Are* (2009).

Figure 40. Danh Vo, *26.05.2009, 8:43*. Installation view of the exhibition P*reis der Nationalgalerie für junge Kunst 2009* at Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin. Photographer: Nick Ash. Retrieved from: http://bortolozzi.com/exhibitions/danh-vo-preis-der-nationalgalerie-fur-junge-kunst-hamburger-bahnhof-berlin/.

Figure 41. Danh Vo, *26.05.2009, 8:43*. Installation view of the exhibition *I Am Still Alive: Politics and Everyday Life in Contemporary Drawing*, Museum of Modern Art New York. Photographer: Thomas Griesel (copyright MOMA NY). Retrieved from: https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1139/installation_images/5985?locale=en.

flow in a sense rendered the artefact 'lit up'. In the next two consecutive displays, one at SMK and the other at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (Figure 36-37), the same chandelier was presented hanging not from the ceiling but from an industrial metal gantry, its base dangling just above the floor.203 The chain and the rosette that usually covers the hook from which the lamp dangles, both useless in this case, were displayed separately, laid out on the floor behind the gantry. The last two shows featuring *08:03:51, 28.05.2009*, organised in 2015 and 2016 in Mexico and Venice, respectively, presented the piece once again suspended from the ceiling (Figure 38-39).204 In both cases, the arrangement broke with traditional rules of symmetry by placing the chandelier in a corner (Mexico) or next to the stairs (Venice).

The piece entitled *26.05.2009, 8:43*, acquired in 2010 by MoMA, was from the outset exhibited disassembled and arranged on the floor in pieces. In the Berlin show, the small components were placed on white and grey sheets of cloth, and the chandelier's core was fixed to a wooden transport pallet (Figure 40).205 Some of the glass parts on display were wrapped up, creating an overall sensation akin to the unpacking phase prior to an art show. Since then, the artefact has always been displayed in this dismembered form. In the next show, held at MoMA, the number of pieces of cloth was reduced and the arrangement of the elements changed significantly, while the presentation of the chandelier's core remained similar (Figure 41).206 For the exhibition hosted by

203   *08:03:51, 28.05.2009* was displayed for the first time at SMK shortly after the accession to the collection, as a part of the ongoing series of presentations of newly acquired works.

       Exhibition *Go Mo Ni Ma Da*, 24 May – 18 August 2013 Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. For more information about the show see: Danh Vo: Go Mo Ni Ma Da. Retrieved December 21, 2017, from http://www.mam.paris.fr/en/expositions/exhibitions-danh-vo.

204   Exhibition الحجارة وادي [Wād al-haŷara], 13 November 2014 – 25 February 2015, *Museo Jumex, Mexico*. For more information about the show see: Danh Vo: الحجارة وادي. Retrieved December 21, 2017, from: https://www.fundacionjumex.org/en/exposiciones/33-danh-vo.

       Exhibition *Slip of the Tongue*, 12 April 2015 – 10 January 2016, Punta della Dogana, Venice. For more information about the show see: Slip of the Tongue. Retrieved December 21, 2017, from: http://www.palazzograssi.it/en/exhibitions/past/slip-of-the-tongue/.

205   Ibidem, Exhibition Preis der Nationalgalerie für junge Kunst (2009).

206   Exhibition *I Am Still Alive: Politics and Everyday Life in Contemporary Drawing*, 23 March – 19 September 2011, Museum of Modern Art, New York. For more information about the show see: I Am Still Alive: Politics and Everyday Life in Contemporary Drawing. Retrieved December 21, 2017, from: https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1139.
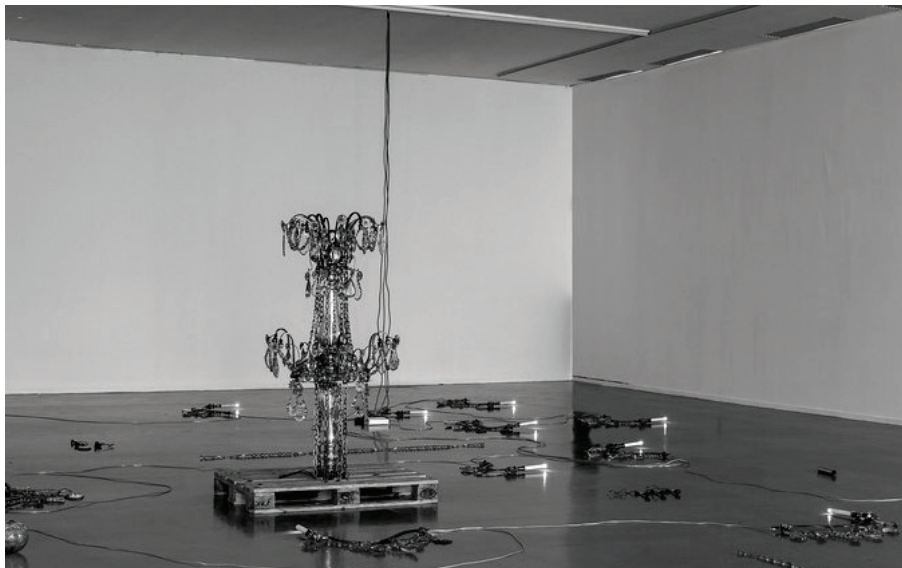
Figure 43. Danh Vo, *16:32:15–26.05.2009*. Installation view of the exhibition *Les fleurs d'intérieur* at Kadist, Paris. Photographer: unknown. Retrieved from: http://kadist.org/program/danh-vo-les-fleurs-dinterieur/.

Figure 44. Danh Vo, *16:32:15–26.05.2009*. Installation view of the exhibition *Go Mo Ni Ma Da* at Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. Photographer: Pierre Antoine. Source: Bonacorsi, I. (2013, June). Danh Vo: Go Mo Ni Ma Da. Domus. Retrieved from http://www.domusweb.it/en/art/2013/06/11/danh_vo_go_mo_nimada.html.

the Musée d'Art Moderne, the chandelier was arranged on the floor in a dark room inaccessible to the public.[207] This time, the light bulbs were lit and the pieces of cloth and wrapping materials removed (Figure 42).

The last chandelier, *16:32:15–26.05.2009*, was shown for the first time in the exhibition organised by Kadist Art Foundation at the end of Vo's residency.[208] The artefact was split in two, separating the core and the lower part, and suspended from a transportation rack, of a different type than the gantry used at SMK (Figure 43). After the show, the piece was purchased by American collectors Thea Westreich Wagner and Ethan Wagner. In 2013, together with the other two chandeliers, it was displayed at Paris's Musée d'Art Modern, this time in a different manner (Figure 44).[209] The core was presented inside a wooden transport crate open on one side so as to resemble a display case. The light was turned on so that the bulbs illuminated the inside of the crate with a warm glow. The lower part of the chandelier, also lit, was suspended inside scaffolding. In 2015 the Whitney Museum of American Art showed the chandelier assembled and suspended from the ceiling in a corner of the gallery (Figure 45).[210] This last show was linked to the donation of an important part of the Wagners' collection to the Whitney and Pompidou. Vo's work was donated to the French institution, and just after the show at the Whitney it was presented again in Paris.[211] This time the chandelier was installed similarly as at Kadist, divided in two and suspended on the transportation rack, with only one difference – this time the lights were switched off (Figure 46).

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207   Ibidem, Exhibition *Go Mo Ni Ma Da.*

208   Ibidem p. 6, Exhibition *Les Fleurs d'intérieur.*

209   Ibidem p. 8, Exhibition *Go Mo Ni Ma Da.*

210   Exhibition *Collected by Thea Westreich Wagner and Ethan Wagner*, 20 November 2015 – 6 March 2016, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. For more information about the show see: Collected by Thea Westreich Wagner and Ethan Wagner. Retrieved December 21, 2017, from: https://whitney.org/Exhibitions/TheWestreichWagnerCollection.

211   Exhibition *The Westreich Wagner Collection,* 10 June 2016 – 27 March 2017, Centre Pompidou, Paris. For more information about the show see: The Westreich Wagner Collection. Retrieved December 21, 2017, from: https://www.centrepompidou.fr/cpv/resource/cKAjgxK/rz59L7g.

Figure 44. Danh Vo, *16:32:15–26.05.2009*. Installation view of the exhibition *Go Mo Ni Ma Da* at Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. Photographer: Pierre Antoine. Source: Bonacorsi, I. (2013, June). Danh Vo: Go Mo Ni Ma Da. Domus. Retrieved from http://www.domusweb.it/en/art/2013/06/11/danh_vo_go_mo_nimada.html.

Figure 45. Danh Vo, *16:32:15–26.05.2009*. Installation view of *Collected by Thea Westreich Wagner and Ethan Wagner at the Whitney Museum of American Art*, New York. Photographer: Ronald Amstutz. Retrieved from: https://whitney.org/Exhibitions/TheWestreichWagnerCollection#installation-25

Figure 46. Danh Vo, 16:32:15–26.05.2009. Installation view of The Westreich Wagner Collection at Centre Pompidou, Paris. Photographer: Georges Meguerditchian ©Centre Pompidou.

Although from a traditional conservation perspective all three art objects seem to be rather conventional and stable, their separate careers and multifarious presentations raise the question of whether the way of displaying each of the chandeliers is 'meaningful' for the readability and understanding of the piece. This question becomes more relevant in the course of my own investigation carried in SMK's archive, which holds a loan request for *08:03:51, 28.05.2009* received from an influential European art institution. The application is illustrated with the photograph of one of the manifestations of the chandelier owned by MoMA – dismantled on the gallery floor – and the requester is asking whether it would be possible to present the piece from SMK in the same way. Since the loan was rejected due to prior arrangements with other institutions, the question remained open.[212] The story of this unfulfilled loan triggered a doubt regarding possible ways of installing the artefact: is there any 'right'

212   M. Torp, in-person interview, September 20, 2017.

way to show each of the chandeliers? While today the easiest manner to approach this issue would be by consulting the artist, who will make this choice – and how – when Vo is no longer available? And accordingly, what kind of information is indispensable in order to allow the artwork's future keepers to make an informed decision in this regard?

3.3 Questioning Museums, Objects and Space: The 'Chandeliers Project' within Vo's artistic practice

What is the 'Chandeliers Project' about? As art historian and curator Yilmaz Dziewior has aptly observed, the networks of references that entangle each of Vo's artistic projects "open up means of understanding which frequently lead into a labyrinth of interpretations", and Vo's formally attractive, albeit enigmatic objects defy simple explanations (Dziewior, 2016, p. 25). In the literature, the 'Chandeliers Project' is commonly explained through the figure of the 'silent' or 'mute witness' to historical events that have been decisive for Vo's life (Fassi, 2010, p. 154; Hergott, 2014, p. 6), a trope which originates from the artist himself.[213] According to art critic Magali Arriola, removing the chandeliers from their context in order to place them in an art setting echoes the act of musealisation, and as such elicits a creative dialogue with the concept of cultural or historical heritage and turns the idea of the imperial trophy on its head (Arriola, 2016).

If the 'Chandeliers Project' engages in a dialogue with the concepts of museum and heritage, it might be potentially positioned within the framework of institutional critique understood as an artistic strategy, and this contextualisation can be supported with examples of how Vo has worked with various institutional partners. Three examples of Vo's collaborations with art institutions reveal how he understands, explores and handles relationships with museums and how his artworks/projects might

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213   The figure of 'silent witnesses' comes from a letter written by Vo describing the project to an unknown recipient, which was published in the leaflet of the exhibition at Kadist Art Foundation in 2009. See: Kadist Art Foundation. (2009). *"Les fleurs d'intérieur": Danh Vo's exhibition press release.* Paris. Retrieved from http://kadist.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/pdf-29_0_0.pdf.

'behave' upon entering the institutional realm. Additionally, they expose the process-based character of Vo's work, how this processuality unfolds within the museum walls, and how it relates to its object-based representation. This section demonstrates the significance of examining a particular artwork through the study of the artist's practices and strategies, and reveals that the way an artist sanctions other works influences the understanding of the artwork in question. It likewise shows the value of the stories that carry these sanctions for conservation-oriented research, and proposes that as such they too might be seen as a part of the 'artwork constituency'.

In 2010 The Walker Art Center acquired Vo's work entitled *Tombstone for Phùng Vo* (2010), which is simultaneously a sculpture and a real tombstone. It consists of a black granite slab with an engraved, gilded inscription. Upon the purchase, the piece was installed in the Sculpture Garden – an outdoor museum gallery. The acquisition contract states that after the death of the artist's father, Phùng Vo, the stone will be shipped to Denmark and placed over his grave in the cemetery in Copenhagen (B. Ryan, 2012).214 In return, the museum will receive four artefacts that belonged to the deceased: a gold chain with a crucifix, a Rolex watch, a Dupont lighter, and a fake American military-academy ring.[215] Once the tombstone has been installed in Denmark, neither the Vo family nor the Walker Art Center will have any obligation to

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214   In an interview with Vo, Walker curator Bartholomew Ryan describes how the museum
       perceived the process of accessioning the artwork by drawing attention to the absurdity of the
       contractual language: "We, as a museum were almost, I wouldn't say forced but sort of required,
       that your father makes a will [...] a tangible document that confirms this conceptual agreement.
       So basically your father is working right now on a will for us which confirms all of these aspects"
       (Ryan, 2011, 17:10').

215   These three objects – a Rolex watch, a Dupont lighter, and a fake American military-academy
       ring – used to be a part of another piece by Vo entitled *If You Were to Climb the Himalayas
       Tomorrow* (2005). The latter consisted of items produced in the context of Western culture that
       were a status symbol and represented a vision of masculinity in 1970s Vietnam (Fassi, 2010). To
       make things still more complicated, these three objects are not the original ones acquired by Vo's
       father upon his arrival in Europe, but their 'updated versions' (B. Ryan, 2012). Art historian
       Élisabeth Lebovici relates that "the artist paid his father an amount for these possessions equal
       to the cost of 'upgraded versions', which Vo Senior subsequently acquired. Phung still owns
       the second versions and wears the watch and ring daily. In 2011, he signed a will with his wife,
       Hao Nguyen, as witness, bequeathing those second, updated items to the Walker Art Center,
       Minneapolis upon the return of his grave marker to Copenhagen. The grave marker is a work in
       the Walker Collection, Tombstone for Phung (2010), acquired in 2011. It will be exchanged for
       Phung's current watch, lighter, and ring upon the will's probation" (Lebovici, 2015, n.p.).

ensure its maintenance; rather, it will be taken care of for as long as there is someone who wishes to do so (B. Ryan, 2011). According to Ryan, the piece can be seen as "a performance scripted by a series of documents – the contract, the will, export papers, etc. – that enacts itself over many years and involves many players, from Vo family and Walker staff members to the lawyer whose expertise was needed to ensure the purchase and anyone else who finds out about the work and becomes engaged with it over time" (B. Ryan, 2012, para. 5).

Another example of Vo's strategy of engaging in a discourse with museum practices and the traditional notion of artworks' authenticity is the case of a prominent work entitled *Death Sentence* (2009), which belongs to the MoMA collection. The artwork consists of sixty sheets of paper with handwritten excerpts from English and French literary and historical sources addressing death and commemoration. The passages were compiled by the artist's friend, Julie Ault, and written down by the artist's father, a skilled calligrapher (Lynch, 2011). In 2017 the piece was requested for a loan by a major American museum that was preparing a retrospective of Vo's work, and the artist decided to display it in a space where the lighting surpassed acceptable conservation conditions.[216] In order to fulfil the plan, an exhibition copy had to be made, which is a common practice in such cases. Typically exhibition copies are produced by scanning and printing, which thanks to technological advances can be highly accurate in visual terms. However, the artist claimed that it was conceptually important for him that the same amount of time, labour and effort be applied to the displayed version as to the original one. Vo proposed that his father make the new display copies in exactly the same way that he had made the original, namely by hand copying, and subsequently the artwork was remade, or rather re-performed. Nevertheless, as the original work was acquired as a 'unique piece', this 'remake' had to be referred to as a 'copy'.

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216   The story of the loan of *Death Sentence* originates from the interview conducted by the author with Christian Rattemeyer, the Harvey S. Shipley Miller Associate Curator in the Department of Drawings at MoMA (C. Rattemeyer, in-person interview, July 14, 2017).

The third demonstration of Vo's unorthodox dealings with museums is an exhibition organised by the SMK in 2012.[217] The show featured the project *We the People*, for which the artist fabricated a full-scale replica of the Statue of Liberty in approximately 250 sheets of copper.[218] There were only a handful of pieces on display an any given time for one simple reason – each of them is a large sculpture in its own right. Moreover, Vo never intended to show all the parts together; on the contrary, from the outset the idea was to spread them all around the world. At the time of the opening of the exhibition in Copenhagen, the project was still ongoing, and having the pieces manufactured in China presented a challenge to the galleries representing the artist in terms of shipping and storage — a problem solved by the SMK exhibition itself.[219] The largest gallery in the SMK building was converted into a storage and shipping centre. The pieces were constantly moved around and replaced – while some were arriving, others were sent to their new owners or to other display venues, and the institution acted as a facilitator of this exchange.[220]

All three examples shed new light on how we might read the 'Chandeliers Project'. They show that Vo's work exists in a continuous dialogue with his other works and practices, with architectural and conceptual spaces, and, as in all the cases presented above, with the key notions of the traditional museum, such as authenticity, collection and display. By challenging museum rules and procedures, his projects might be seen

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217 Exhibition *We the People* (*Detail*), 1 June 2012 – 31 December 2013, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen. For more information about the show see: We the People (Detail). Retrieved December 21, 2017, from: http://www.smk.dk/en/visit-the-museum/exhibitions/past-exhibitions/2013/we-the-people-detail/.

218 For a detailed description of the project see: Thatcher, 2013.

219 The story of the exhibition *We the People* (*Detail*) originates from the interview conducted by the author with SMK curator Marianne Torp (M. Torp, in-person interview, September 20, 2017).

220 The artist described the concept of the display at SMK as follows: "One of the best destinations for *We The People* was the National Gallery of Denmark. They wanted the project so much that they had to start thinking how to get around the bureaucracy. So they proposed to host the project as a storage space for two years. Otherwise, I would have – together with the galleries – needed to find a storage space when certain pieces were not being exhibited. In 1995 the museum built an extension with a gigantic atrium for sculpture. But there was always something wrong with this space, so it never really functioned. And that was the space they offered for us to use. It is these kinds of things that made the project so interesting because it was bending rules. The whole institution had to rethink its role and be creative." (Thatcher, 2013, p. 3)

as a playful and humorous form of institutional critique supported by institutions themselves. The three stories demonstrate as well that despite being object-based, Vo's work has a performative character. His objects are never static: "they move, transmute, perform, and are performed; they insist on their own status as both matter and energy" (Fassi, 2010, p. 157). Should the variable manifestations of the 'Chandeliers Project' be considered as a form of toying with the constraints of the museum realm as well? And if so, how can this conceptual property be preserved for the future?

Besides being performative, Vo's objects are also imbued with a Benjaminian 'aura'. Their origins, provenance and history are as important as their form, function and appearance. As such, they demand that we approach them as unique, historical objects – evidence of the past. The importance of the original chandeliers, as well as the artistic gesture of altering their form by partitioning and disassembling them, is more explicit when seen in comparison with Vo's other projects, such as the seminal work *Lot 20. Two Kennedy Administration Cabinet Room Chairs* (2013). It consists of furniture given to US Secretary of Defence Robert S. McNamara by Jacqueline Kennedy, and subsequently bought by the artist at auction. Vo shows them dismembered, with their wooden frames taken apart, their upholstery removed and the leather that originally covered the chairs' seats hanging on the wall so as to resemble a "freshly peeled animal pelt" (Godfrey, 2016, p. 199). These objects, such as chairs or chandeliers, at once ordinary and unique, might be framed within the Duchampian tradition of the readymade. What makes them different is the importance of their specific heritage, or in other words, their condition as evidence. The gesture of de-contextualising and disassembling is a significant artistic strategy that renders these objects visible, or, applying the rhetorical trope of prosopopeia, makes them speak. As Arriola puts it, "by dissecting these elements, scattering their parts and then exhibiting some of these in display cases as if they were relics, Vo not only reveals the latent fragility of the objects on which power rested […] but also the inevitable vulnerability of the people who used and instrumentalised them" (Arriola, 2016, p. 187).

The last essential trait that characterises Vo's practice is the notion of space, which is important for understanding the artist's approach to display and key to scrutinising the variable presentations of 'Chandeliers Project'. Vo curates shows, not only exhibitions of his own works but also those presenting artists that are in some way

important for him.[221] He employs non-traditional distributions of artworks, paying as much attention to relationships between the pieces exhibited as to individual objects and conceptualising the ensemble.[222] Moreover, the artist repeatedly plays with the architecture or against it by filling small spaces with bulky objects while leaving the large spaces almost void.[223] The conceptualisation of the exhibition space in Vo's practice takes place on several levels, as for him artist's talks, interviews and catalogues represent further alternative spaces for the presentation of his work. Accordingly, the stories communicated through these media can be seen as further manifestations of artworks. He describes this concept as follows:

> I put effort into publications about my work like catalogues, or even
> interviews and articles, because I also perceive them in terms of space and
> want to think about how we can use these spaces. An interview may be
> a space where I am providing a lot of information, but I don't necessarily see
> it as a separate thing. I try to see what fits where [...]. (Maerkle, 2011, para. 2)

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221   Vo has curated several shows of artists whose work is of particular interest to him, like Felix
        Gonzalez-Torres, but also group shows where he has included his own work, such as the
        transhistorical exhibition *Slip of the Tongue* at Punta Della Dogana in 2015. An important
        exhibition to mention in this context is also *I M U U R 2*, which took place in 2012 at the
        Guggenheim Museum in NY, in which Vo filled the space of the gallery with a personal
        collection of artefacts and artworks by Martin Wong, a Chinese-American artist who died of
        AIDS in 1999.

222   Curator and art historian Mark Godfrey summarized Vo's practice as exhibition maker by
        stating that: "Many artists and curators, when arranging an installation of separate works,
        concentrate on formal juxtaposition (one thing near another looking like it, or made of
        something similar). Vo, whose exhibitions include hunks of copper, piles of driftwood,
        chandeliers, copied letters, gilded cardboard boxes, archival documents, photogravures of found
        photographs, or even works by other artists, instead thinks more about how the ideas unleashed
        by an object might charge the encounter with another object nearby". (Godfrey, 2016, p. 197).
        Vo himself summarizes his exhibition-making as follows: "I don't consider my exhibitions
        empty; on the contrary, I think they are massive and intrusive. The space between carries a lot
        of meaning. The absence of space is also significant" (Godfrey, 2016, p. 195).

223   See: Interview conducted by Marianne Torp on Danh Vo's exhibition *mothertongue* at
        the Danish Pavilion in the 2015 Venice Biennale, available on-line at: https://www.kunst.
        dk/fileadmin/_kunst2011/user_upload/Dokumenter/Danish_Pavillon/Press_kit_2015/
        Marianne_Torp_interview_final.pdf.

In line with this approach, one of the alternative 'exhibition spaces' for the 'Chandeliers Project' is the publication entitled *HIC SVNT LEONES* launched for the exhibition held at Kunsthalle Basel in 2009 (Vo & Ault, 2009).[224] It is not a catalogue in the traditional sense but rather an artist's book authored by Vo together with Julie Ault, who describes this collaboration as more akin to co-curating than co-editing (Vo & Ault, 2010). The similarity between the book and the exhibition space starts already with the cover – entirely white, with no title or authors' names whatsoever – clearly resembling the concept of the white cube. Instead of photographs of artworks, the book contains images documenting processes through which the artworks were made or illustrating related events and stories.[225] Interpretative texts are replaced by press clippings and at first glance unrelated essays by various authors, for instance, Emil Cioran and Pier Paolo Pasolini. While the content's structure mimics a common curatorial strategy of 'thematic universes', the description of the images and the sources of the texts are provided only at the end of the catalogue in a form akin to wall labels. As Ault observes, unlike traditional art exhibition publications, "what happens with this catalogue is that [...] this is a kind of reverse of giving information" (Vo & Ault, 2010).

Based on this study of Vo's artistic practice, we may now draw substantial conclusions as to the multidimensionality of the 'Chandeliers Project'. We have seen potential challenges related to framing the project as collectable and approaching its possible future manifestations. Firstly, Vo's artworks/projects have a high degree of performativity and from the outset should be regarded as such. Secondly, by toying with its rules and constraints, he often uses the museum – as a concept and as an institution – as a point of reference, which could be a significant aspect to take into account when designing display strategies for his pieces. Thirdly, the authenticity of objects incorporated by Vo and their creative transformations are highly important for understanding his work. Fourthly, the artist is interested in display space as a medium, and while curating his own shows he meticulously builds conceptual relationships

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224   The Latin title of the catalogue corresponds to the English title of the exhibition: *Where the Lions Are*. See: Footnote 198, p. 164.

225   As for the 'Chandeliers Project', the catalogue contains, for example, photographs illustrating the signing ceremony of the peace accords at the former Hôtel Majestic (p. 7) and the last photograph taken before the renovation of the ballroom (p. 19). See: Vo, D., & Ault, J. (2009). HIC SVNT LEONES. (A. Szymczyk, Ed.). Basel: Kunsthalle Basel.

between exhibited objects. Even though the presented stories and opinions still do not offer a straight path to follow while deciding on the future installations of each of the chandeliers, they help to identify particular issues that can be traced in the next step of the research. Moreover, they provide a basis for interpreting the artist's opinions – which is the direction this study will follow.

3.4   Artists' Sanctions, Artists' Stories: Giving objects a voice

Up to a certain point in his career Vo granted many interviews and so-called 'artist's talks', and appeared eager to explain his work to the public.[226] Many of them can be accessed online – video and audio recorded or published in journals and magazines. In line with the idea of an expanded, conceptual exhibition space that includes catalogues and different kinds of artist's utterances, both textual and verbal, this section presents how Vo has used some of these 'alternative displays' for presenting and explaining the 'Chandeliers Project'. It is structured in three parts: the first one presents stories that shed new light on the conceptual underpinnings of the artwork, the second gathers and analyses the artist's thoughts about variable arrangements of the chandeliers on display, and the third gathers together statements demonstrating his concerns for the open-ended nature of his works. The excerpts from Vo's statements reveal how the information provided by the artist is structured and communicated and prove its importance for the reading of the work as well as for future approaches to its presentation.

As Vo relates it in various interviews, the artwork took shape the day he took his father to see the ballroom of the former Hôtel Majestic:[227]

> My dad visited me in France. I took a cab with my dad to the hotel before
> they took down the chandeliers. Of course, he was cursing and swearing

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226   This attitude changed when Vo's carrier started to gain speed. In an article from 2014 he was already named 'the Salinger of the art world' in reference to notoriously reclusive American writer J.D. Salinger known for rejecting any form of commenting on his work (Knott, 2014).

227   The same story is recounted in writings by others who have interviewed Vo; see e.g.: Maerkle, 2011; N. A. Taylor, 2015.

during the cab ride – and talking about going to the room of death. [...] You can see that the chandelier was designed for the room, so it's quite spectacular. (Statens Museum for Kunst, 2012)

[...] when he entered the room, and that for me was really what formulated the project he could only say: oh my God, Danh I think that the Queen of Denmark must have one of these in her home, and I thought that was what the project was about, that this object is about when you enter the room you leave all your sorrows behind. This is what it was created for. And this is what its function is, basically. And whatever comes after that is secondary, I think. This person that was really attached to the history of such a thing, would think of the Queen of Denmark. What does that really mean? I don't know really how do you mediate such things. (Vo & Ault, 2010)

Yet, besides acting as 'silent witnesses' or the evidence of historical events – the interpretation featured in the literature – there is another, seemingly opposing reading of the chandeliers, namely as artefacts designed for enjoyment: objects that 'make you forget things' even if these 'things' are formative for one's biography.

The chandelier as a decorative piece that astonishes and the story behind the way the artwork took on this meaning is also reflected in the titles given to each of the artefacts. As Vo has stated:

You come into this magnificent room. And ballrooms are of course designed for that. To make you forget. And I thought – that was the piece. And that was why I wanted ... just this moment ... for each piece, the number [the title] is a date and time of the disassembling of it. And nothing else (Tapia O., 2017).

Another conceptual dimension of the 'Chandeliers Project' is related to the circumstances in which the undertaking unfolded, and that story positions the artwork within the discourses on the value of heritage in the global economy. In an interview conducted recently by Clare Molloy for Kadist Art Foundation, Vo explained that the process of purchasing the chandeliers and all the actors involved in it are significant for the reading of the piece:

> [...] they [the chandeliers] have of course like a historical element that
> attracted me, but I think if that was only the thing, then I don't think it
> would be such an interesting artwork. I think also it had the story of [...] the
> sale of it, the finances around this circumstances [...]. (Tapia O., 2017, ′6:43)

The story of the sale of the Hôtel Majestic as a significant motif of the artwork was already evoked in the catalogue to the Basel exhibition in a rather unorthodox and indirect way. The entire page 11 of the book is composed of fragments of a New York Times article describing the massive sale of historic properties by the French government (Vo & Ault, 2009). The story was presented again during the public talk at the MoMA in an expanded version, with more details and new threads:

> The French government [...] they didn't have money to maintain the
> historical buildings, so they, as many other countries, are selling out their
> buildings. And in Paris, the first interested buyers in these historical
> buildings are Americans, Arabs and the Chinese of course. [...]

> And the Qatar family. We found out that they actually own the building.
> Then you think, they are spending the oil money, because it is going to run
> out, in reinvesting in real estate. [...] What their problem is, that they don't
> want to have any public notion that they are using oil money on buying
> a historical building and then dismantle it. But we found furthermore out
> that, because they are only investing in real estate, so they leased out the
> buildings that they are buying, and the one who was interested in it was [...]
> the Shanghai and Hong Kong Hotel Group (Vo & Ault, 2010).

In a recent article about Vo, art critic Calvin Tomkins reveals another backstage story related to the sale of the chandeliers, which can be interpreted in line with Vo's approaches questioning the structure of the art world and its institutions. Tomkins reports that it was the sale of 26.05.2009, 8:43 to MoMA that allowed Vo to finalise the transaction with the owner of the former hotel: "I sold it before I bought it, Vo said, gleefully" (Tomkins, 2018).

As the above-cited excerpts show, Vo is rather open to talk about the backstage of his projects, and that includes his choices concerning variable options for presenting the chandeliers. While none of Vo's remarks on this topic provides instructions per se, all are enlightening for decisions to be taken in the future. When art critic Timothée Chaillou asked the artist why he dismantled one of the chandeliers for the Parisian show, the artist explained his interest in experimenting and the circumstantial character of his choices:

I like to try different methods of installing a work each time it is shown, if it's possible, and if it makes sense. I really liked the way the chandelier looked at the Musée d'Art Moderne, spread out on the floor and lit up. The other chandeliers were borrowed from individuals and institutions and came with the support systems used in the exhibition. There was less flexibility with those, but the concept behind the exhibition was to have them come together again in Paris, after they had travelled and been exhibited in different museums around the world; the idea was not necessarily to play with their components. (Chaillou, 2013)

The same issue was addressed and explained during the public talk at MoMA. A member of the audience raised a question about whether the different ways of arranging the chandeliers on view carry additional layers of meanings.[228] Vo responded as follows:

> Actually, I am much more practically oriented. […] It is very difficult, you have to imagine that the biggest chandelier is probably four meters, and really wide. Chandeliers are not meant to travel, they are not meant to be disassembled. What I initially tried to do was to understand with these objects how you actually can display them, so I must admit that I was actually just testing things out. And then it creates meaning. And people project meaning in it. (Vo & Ault, 2010)

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228   "Are you not trying to impart something by virtue of how you lay out the chandelier or display the chandeliers in those three exhibitions?" ("Danh Vo in conversation with Julie Ault," 2010).

Besides referring to the physical way the chandeliers might be arranged on display, various statements present Vo's opinion about their conceptual framing and contextualisation. During the MoMA talk, Vo admitted that from the outset he had struggled with the idea of producing a mere art object, which for him is equal to a 'cultural souvenir', and affirmed that he did not want to make a piece that directly referred to "his personal fetish about these artefacts" (Vo & Ault, 2010). Vo stated that overcoming this concern was also conditioned by his father's response upon visiting the ballroom: "I have a neurosis about enclosing objects but he really opened it up, he made the object contradictory and made me think" (Maerkle, 2011, para. 7).

Although Vo fosters the 'mysteriousness' of his objects and favours instinctive interpretations and meanings prompted by the location and context (Godfrey, 2016), he is aware that the anecdotes linked to his biography have become a leitmotif of his oeuvre and the lens through which it is analysed. At a certain point, his strategy of turning personal stories into the epicentre of his work became incompatible with his wish to allow the public to construct their own understanding of the objects on display. The following excerpts represent his helplessness in the face of this issue and his struggles with finding possible solutions:

> I am not interested in imposing meaning on certain objects. I would like to give a possibility to the meaning embedded in these objects, we all are taking part in negotiating the meaning of it. One has to understand that under this chandelier the Ivory Coast peace was negotiated, the Kosovo peace was negotiated. That was a lot of events under this kind of things. And what can be worse than a typical artistic position in occupying the meaning?
> I felt that that was the problem. I felt that I personally had to deal with it in a certain way. And it is, of course, a bit paradoxical because on the one hand I probably subconsciously had one set. [...] This is something I guess I have to understand better. When time comes. (Vo & Ault, 2010)

Besides interviews, talks and catalogues, another way of sanctioning the reading of an artwork is through the information provided on display, and Vo often 'curates' this aspect of his exhibitions as well. Already during the first presentation of the 'Chandeliers Project' at Kadist, the pieces on display were accompanied by an extraordinary wall label in the form of a brass plaque designed and produced by the

artist. With time it became a regular practice of Vo's, and brass plaques started to appear in subsequent exhibitions. Although provided by the artist together with the actual piece, they rarely receive much attention in the literature and have hardly ever appear in the exhibitions' visual documentation. However, there are some exceptions – the brass plaque produced for one of the exhibitions that featured the *Tombstone for Phùng Vo* (2010) was acquired as a part of the artwork by Walker Art Centre. In the case of the 'Chandeliers Project', the information on the brass plaques is not fixed and depends on both the chandelier and the setting.[229] The differences are minor but result in a shift in the emphasis from one aspect of the work to another, or, in other words, from one story to another. Vo explains his approach to the use of the plaques and the control over the contextual information in an interview conducted recently by Clare Molloy for Kadist Art Foundation:

> CM: Is it the first time that you are using one of those plaques? Can you explain what those plaques are? You've used them since.

> DV: For me, the work has a lot of meaning, but I don't believe you can impose them on the other person, and I love the idea that, as an audience [when] you came you were strange to what you were seeing. I thought there is a certain beauty in that because that is a reality, and really from the very

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229 The text on the brass plaque that accompanied the chandelier during the exhibition at Kadist reads:

16:32:15 - 26.05.2009 / Chandelier from the former Hotel Majestic, avenue Kleber Hosted: Headquarters of the German military government, UNESCO, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Paris Peace Accords, negotiations on Kosovo, Ivory Coast and a long list of international issues. Recently sold by the State in 2007. [Courtesy Kadist Art Foundation]

The one made for the exhibition at the Hamburger Bahnhof shifts the importance away from the signing of documents aiming to end the Vietnam war and over to other peace negotiations held in the ballroom, but also recalls the circumstances of the sale of the building:

26.05.2009, 8:43, 2009
Late 19th century chandelier from the ballroom of the former Hotel Majestic, Avenue Kleber, Paris. The hotel functioned as the headquarters for the German Military Administration during the occupation of France in World War II. It then hosted UNESCO before becoming the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the site of the signing ceremony known as Paris Peace Accords and subsequently the nine-point plan aimed at guaranteeing the lasting peace in Vietnam in 1973. The building also hosted peace negotiations on Kosovo, Ivory Coast and a list of other international conflicts. After being sold, it is now the future location of the first Peninsula Hotel in Europe. [Retrieved from: http://bortolozzi.com/exhibitions/danh-vo-preis-der-nationalgalerie-fur-junge-kunst-hamburger-bahnhof-berlin/]

beginning, I didn't believe in art as a bridging, I didn't think that art should
be a reconciliation of history. I think it should be this strangeness when you
confront it, I think that is much more related to real life [...]. (Tapia O., 2017)

Although Vo's works are rather hermetic and obscure for the broad public, especially
when accompanied only by scarce description, Vo's statements prove that 'dispensing'
contextual information about his works is a part of his artistic strategy. Whereas
in the first excerpt below, from 2011, Vo seems to still be experimenting with and
contemplating this issue as a sort of challenge, the following excerpt, from 2015,
demonstrates that with time his convictions hardened:

> I believe that texts provide a key, as well as a title. In the end the Basel texts
> were just the captions for the works, with the titles and descriptions. It's
> a balance that I'm working on – how much information do I actually give?
> There's nothing new under the sun, it's a strategy that has been used for
> a long time. It's a way of emphasizing objects. It's like Richard Prince. It's
> "Untitled" with a title. That opens things up, and of course many artists have
> used it afterwards [...]. (Maerkle, 2011, para. 4)

> I do not think that artists should be servants. You do your stuff and people
> have to be in alert to discover and look for it. That's the job of the viewer, not
> my job. [...] I think it is a dialogue: my job is to do whatever I do and his [the
> viewer's] job is to be aware and look. The art industry – and also education
> departments, texts and whatever – are treating viewers as stupid. And this
> makes people even more stupid. (Slow Words, 2015, para. 5)

Selected quotations from various interviews with and talks given by the artist point
towards several issues related to the 'Chandeliers Project' that preoccupy Vo and
that are recorded only in his statements. These accounts expose different layers of
the artwork's meanings, provide insights into the circumstances in which the project
was conceived, and elucidate the artist's motivation behind the diverse ways it can be
presented, as well as his approach to providing information to the public. They not
only contextualise the objects, but, more importantly, are what actually turns them
into an artwork. Subsequent subchapters will offer a reflection on the importance of
this information for the care of Vo's works, as well as for designing and managing their
possible futures.

3.5   Multifarious Ways of Musealising a Project

3.5.1   The 'Object of Conservation' and the 'Artwork Constituency'

> Dear Aga,
>
> We have considered your request to pursue your research about collaboration with artists in the documentation of contemporary artworks within a museum collection, with a special focus on conservation [...]. The conservation needs of the Vo are minimal, as it is made up of inorganic materials that are stable in a museum environment. I cannot foresee much in the way of conservation treatment of this work. We are not involved with the installation documentation of this work so I don't think I can be helpful to you. I did a quick search in Google images and I noted that there are variable ways to set this work up. [...] We can offer you the opportunity to make an appointment to review the [artwork's] files. If you want to chat about the conservation of the inorganic materials which make up the sculpture, I will be happy to discuss them with you.[230]

The decision to open this new subchapter with this quote stems from the need to demonstrate that the concept of conservation as defined in the first chapter of this dissertation (see: Chapter 1, p. 81) is not necessarily common among museum professionals dealing with contemporary artworks. The variable modes of displaying each of the chandeliers that may in the future pose challenges, identified above as a key conservation problem, might understandably be considered by many not to be a conservation-related issue at all.[231] Although the email cited at the beginning of this section suggests otherwise, the chandeliers do indeed present problems within the framework of traditionally understood material-based conservation, and the aim of this section is to demonstrate that even detailed technical queries related to the care of the chandeliers as artefacts cannot be solved without studying the artwork as a whole, and in consequence without careful research into the stories narrated by both the artist and the other parties involved in its career.

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230   Excerpt from an email received from a conservator at one of the institutions studied in the course of this research. Both the institution and the author of the email have consciously been kept anonymous.

231   See the discussions around the notion of conservation outlined in Chapter 1, p. 79.

Contrary to what is suggested in the above-cited email, each of the chandeliers, even when approached merely as a physical object, needs to be considered as a unique, irreplaceable chandelier with a particular history, not as brass, electrical wires, glass, cardboard or other inorganic or organic materials. Although two of the institutional keepers of the 'Chandeliers Project' still classify the piece as 'a sculpture', all three of them acknowledge the special character of the art object in the context of this particular artwork. In the imperishable category of 'medium' or 'technique' in the artwork's tombstone information, all of the museums state that the piece is made of a 'late 19th-century chandelier'.[232] The implications of these taxonomies become evident when analysing the chandeliers through the lens of day-to-day practices related to collection care.

A common task for museum conservators is cleaning. While some objects arrive covered in different kinds of dirt at the time of accession to the collection, others, even though shown in controlled exhibition spaces, gather dust on display in the museum itself. For traditional sculptures, superficial dirt is undesirable and may disturb the aesthetic perception of the piece as intended by the artist. Dirt can also be a dangerous agent of decay, as it is a carrier of chemically reactive substances that can alter the appearance of the original surface. As a result, superficial dirt ought to be removed. However, the case of the chandeliers is different. The superficial dirt was accumulated throughout the Hôtel Majestic's glory years, and forms part of the artefacts' history. When the SMK conservator Louise Cone asked the artist about this issue directly, he said that he would prefer to keep the old dirt as a trace of history (L. Cone, in-person interview, September 14, 2017). As a consequence, in this case cleaning is limited to the removal of loose dust accumulated during subsequent shows.

A further conservation issue is the replacement of the components. As Cone stated: "things happen and it is glass and people are people and you make mistakes" (L. Cone, in-person interview, September 14, 2017). In other words, glass prisms break easily during the install, at which point replacement might become an option to consider.

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232   In the CMS of SMK, *08:03:51, 28.05.2009* was classified as a sculpture. At MoMA *26.05.2009, 8:43* belongs to the collection of painting and sculpture, and at Pompidou *16:32 – 26.05.2009* is classified as 'Oeuvre en 3 dimensions / Installation'.

In fact, a precedent was set during the piece's career at SMK. According to Cone, while some of the prisms were already broken before the acquisition, others cracked during the preparation of one of the displays. As the latter happened in Venice, famous for its glassmakers, the reproduction of the broken parts was actually considered as an option. In the end, due to circumstances the reconstruction never happened, and the decision was taken to leave the space of the broken prism empty. Other fragile glass elements to be substituted eventually in the future are the light bulbs. As the SMK piece has never been displayed turned on, until now there has been no need to evaluate their condition. Hence, it is highly possible that some of the bulbs are already worn, or similarly to the prisms they might break during the handling of the piece. Yet, the replacement of bulbs in artworks may prove challenging due to changes in market regulations. The traditional, incandescent ones are slowly disappearing to be substituted with other types of electric lighting.

These micro-decisions or micro-interventions, seemingly insignificant to the general concept of the piece, constitute the everyday work of the museum conservator. Only some of these challenges can be identified and addressed today – the rest remain unforeseeable. To confront them, broader questions need to be addressed: is the aesthetic appearance of each of the chandeliers important for the reading of the piece? Is the public, while looking at the piece, supposed to admire its shape and design? What kind of alteration of the latter could influence the comprehension of the artwork? Essential for answering these questions is the story of Vo's father visiting the former ballroom and the concept of chandeliers that astonish and "make you forget things" (see: p. 180). Clearly, the splendour of the artefact is what provokes amazement, and therefore its aesthetic appearance is a significant property that should be preserved. This observation may lead to the conclusion that if the gaps resulting from the broken prisms influence the overall aesthetic perception and the 'impressiveness' of the chandelier, they should be filled in with reconstructions. Hence, also these queries, which relate to traditionally defined conservation as a material-based discipline, can be answered only through careful analysis of the statements given by the artist and through the study of the artwork's origins.

Apart from chandeliers, the 'artwork constituency' includes other physical objects that hold agency over subsequent manifestations of the 'Chandeliers Project'. All of them afford different display options and are key to understanding the particular

'mode of presentation' of each of the chandeliers. As auxiliary, seemingly replaceable components they might be considered 'display furniture' or part of the scenography, similar to a plinth or vitrine. However, since they are chosen by the artist and assigned to the artwork, with time they might become a part of it. Still, since they have a different status at each of the institutions under study, they are currently not considered 'the objects of conservation' as such.[233]

Before entering the SMK collection, *08:03:51, 28.05.2009* had only been exhibited once, hanging from the ceiling of the gallery at the Kunsthalle Basel. However, this way of displaying it was conditioned by the characteristics of the space, and few museums have a gallery that would allow the piece to be presented in such a way. As recalled by SMK curator Marianne Torp, the solution to this challenge was found accidentally. Upon its arrival at the museum, the chandelier was assembled on an industrial gantry supplied by the transport firm:

> We borrowed it [the gantry] from that shipping company, just to transport it [the chandelier], and I think even for Louise and Morten [conservator and art-handler] to assemble it, they needed that structure. And then Danh saw that [the chandelier assembled on the gantry]. And he was like: no, this is great. I want to keep it like that. And that was the whole deal, [...] we said to the shipping company: we just mounted this chandelier on your tower, could we buy that tower from you, because now the artist wants to keep it. And they said: no. Because they have that custom made, for their own purposes. Ok, so then can you [order] a new, custom-made one, we will pay for that production, and the response was: no we want to have that original one. We don't want a copy. Which I found so hilariously funny because suddenly this whole idea of what is original and what is a copy that we have in the art world for ages, suddenly that applies to a tower which belongs to a shipping company. So we actually had to talk to their supplier, blacksmith or whatever and make him do a copy from theirs [...]. (M. Torp, in-person interview, September 20, 2017)

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233   At Centre Pompidou the rack's status is that of an element of scenography (P. Sticht, in-person interview, November 12, 2017).

The story of the construction that supports 16:32:15–26.05.2009, the chandelier from Centre Pompidou, is similar, although it started long before the acquisition took place. The then owner of the former Hôtel Majestic agreed to lend out the chandelier for the purpose of the show at Kadist on the condition that it would be dismounted and transported by professionals. Thus, to relocate the piece to the gallery, the Kadist team hired a company specialized in the transport of chandeliers. Director of Kadist's Parisian office Émilie Villez, who was involved in the production of the show, recalled the circumstances of the backstage decision making as follows:

> It is like when you ship a piano, you have to have like a specific company. For chandeliers it is the same. And [...] only those companies know how to do it. So they dismantled part of it [the chandelier], and have this [the rack], because you cannot crate it directly. And Danh liked this and he decided, 'Let's keep it for the show because it looks really good'. And you will see this little room [the gallery], it really has a low ceiling. His first idea was to hang it from the ceiling, but it wouldn't work, so we decided to keep it that way and block the door [with the rack]. (E. Villez, in-person interview, November 24, 2017)

Yet, the apparently one-time decision to display the piece on the rack was conditioned, among other factors, by the height of the gallery space. After the show, the metal construction was returned to the transport company, and during subsequent exhibitions the chandelier was presented without it. The rack was reincorporated into the presentation when the piece entered the collection of Centre Pompidou. Pamela Sticht from the collections department, who supervised the acquisition of the piece, justified this choice in the following way, in an interview conducted by the author:

> Because in Centre Pompidou, the architecture is very special, and we cannot hang a lot of stuff from the ceiling. [...] Because we wanted to show it in the middle, and in certain rooms, we cannot suspend things from the ceiling. And it would have been necessary to have metal grids, and it would have been very ugly. [...] And the idea was also to have the lighting, special lighting which would make shadows on the floor. [...] [So] we did it [the rack]. [...] The studio of Danh Vo told us that we should have this because

actually, this was from the [...] transporter, [...], that is what I've heard, that Danh Vo was interested in this kind of representation because it is a part of how you can transport it (P. Sticht, in-person interview, November 12, 2017).

Also in the case of *26.05.2009, 8:43*, from the MoMA collection, there is an object assigned to accompany the piece on display. At the Hamburger Bahnhof the core of the chandelier was presented on a wooden pallet (Figure 40).[234] As the chandelier arrived directly from Paris, it was probably the same device that was used for transport purposes. Interestingly, the pallet that served as a base for the chandelier's core at the MoMA exhibition two years later was identical to the one used in Berlin (Figure 41).[235] In all likelihood, the core of the chandelier has never been separated from the palette – there was never a need to do so – meaning that it has been stored together with the piece and, in a way, has become incorporated as a part of the artwork.[236]

The accounts of the chance circumstances that shaped both the 'artwork constituency' and the way the three art objects may be presented have a twofold importance. Firstly, these stories illustrate the way the artist makes choices that influence the actual physical appearance of the artwork and provide insights into his display strategies. Secondly, they demonstrate that these choices were often made in and triggered by interactions with institutions. Thirdly, they point towards another level of the artwork's reading. As Vo stated in the excerpt quoted before, "chandeliers are not meant to travel, they are not meant to be disassembled" (see: p. 182). With the gesture of showing them as 'objects of transport', the artist transformed the nature of the chandeliers from luxurious decoration to significant artefacts – carriers of the artwork's meanings. Their displacement and shifting ownership, both notions linked to the issue of belonging present in the artist's biography, endow the chandeliers with what Tom McDonough has identified as a 'mnemonic function' (Brinson, 2018; McDonough, 2016, p. 217). Brinson connects this mobility of cultural artefacts to the colonial mechanisms of former

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234   Ibidem p. 6. Exhibition *Preis der Nationalgalerie für junge Kunst*.

235   Ibidem p. 8. Exhibition I *Am Still Alive: Politics and Everyday Life in Contemporary Drawing*.

236   However, the palette is not listed in the museum's online catalogue, see: https://www.moma.org/collection/works/135979.

empires linked with the flux of global trade seen as an inherent feature of capitalism (Brinson, 2018). Hence, a chandelier presented 'in transit' conveys different meanings than when suspended from the ceiling – while the first represents displaced heritage, it is the latter that astonishes and 'makes people forget'.

The artist's statements and the stories from institutional stages of the artwork's career presented in this section add new dimensions to the conservation problem defined at the beginning of the chapter. The initial query as to how to display each of the chandeliers in the future primarily addresses issues related to presentation understood as physical installation: on the gantry, hung from the ceiling, on the rack, dismantled on the floor, with the lights on or off. However, as has been seen, interactions with other works, the context of a given show's narrative, and the information provided to the public may also alter the artwork and, as such, are factors that need to be considered when making decisions about how it should be displayed.

The question arises as to whether it is possible to control all these factors. Probably not, or at least not without deploying a complicated, military-like strategic operation around each exhibition. Furthermore, the lack of conciseness and the often contradictory character of the factual information embedded in the stories presented above leaves space for interpretation, subjectivity and playfulness, which are, and always have been, concepts inseparable from the notion of art itself. Nevertheless, in line with the definition of conservation as presented in the second chapter of this book, all decisions related to the possible futures of an artwork should be, above all, informed, or in other words based on or influenced by a complete understanding of the situation. As has been argued throughout this chapter, this can be achieved only through a careful study of the entire 'artwork constituency', which consists of physical objects and the stories that complement and contextualise them. These stories should be available and accessible in the moment of decision making, and accordingly should be actively collected and conserved together with the art object. How is this issue addressed by the institutional keepers of the 'Chandeliers Project'? The next section aims to address this question by presenting and assessing the approach to and structure of the documentation on Vo's work at each of the three museums.

3.5.2   Documentation, Presentation and Collaboration: A comparative study
            of institutional practices

What we have, then, are three art objects representing one artwork, distributed among
the collections of three influential art museums. This unique situation has provided
an opportunity for a comparative investigation into how the stories identified in this
chapter as carriers of a significant part of the artwork's identity are represented, and how
they function in an institutional setting. And yet, discrepancies in the organisational
structure and the character of each of the institutions, unequal access to their resources
related to their confidentiality policies, and differences in the institutional story of
each chandelier, have made this endeavour particularly challenging. Due to the
circumstances mentioned earlier and to the differing points of access to each of the
institutions – through a conservator, curator or researcher – the assessments have not
been made on an equal basis. Consequently, all the factors that have influenced the
results of the comparison are addressed in the subsequent sections describing each
of the institutions studied. The investigation is structured according to the focal
points identified in Chapter 2, and unfolds around the museums' procedures and
infrastructure for artwork-related documentation, practices concerning conservation
and collection care with an emphasis on the artist interview, and the collaboration with
the artist regarding the artwork in question. The research was guided by the following
question: how do each of the institutions under study deal with the conservation
problem identified in the previous sections in terms of documentation and decision
making?

Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen

SMK is a national art museum that on the one hand holds art collections dating back to
the 16th century, and on the other actively collects contemporary art by both Danish
and international artists. In the Collection, Research and Conservation Department
there is one curator responsible for collecting and exhibiting works created after
1960 up to the present day. While conservation tasks are distributed according to
traditional, medium-related areas, one conservator divides her time between sculpture
and contemporary art. The documentation of a particular artwork from the collection
is dispersed among diverse institutional archives and each structural unit collects the
information of its interest. The basic tombstone information for each piece can be

accessed through CMS. The sub-department Collection Management and Digitization administers two other databases that hold information related to the artworks from the collection. While the first one provides access to photographic documentation, the second stores the data from the Registry Office consisting of documents associated with loans. There is also a separate database accessible only through the Archive Assistant containing the 'official correspondence' addressed to the museum related to acquisitions, loans, etc. However, less 'official' emails between curators or conservators and artists are stored only in the personal files of museum employees. Another archive, this time an analogue one, houses information related to the artists represented in the collection. With regard to Vo, it consists mostly of printouts of information found on the Internet, such as interviews and critiques as well as photocopies of Danish press articles about the artist and his work. The conservation department has a separate paper archive where conservation-related documentation is kept, mostly in the form of reports. The digital data, for instance photographic documentation of conservation activities, is organized in folders on the museum server.

While the exhibitions that featured *08:03:51, 28.05.2009* are listed in the CMS record, none of the aforementioned archives contain images depicting the consecutive presentations of the object or of the other two chandeliers. For instance, in conservation-related digital documentation kept on the museum server, one finds the photographs of the piece taken during installs by conservators and art handlers, most of which depict the condition of the chandelier or the installation process. Nevertheless, this documentation does not show the final way the artefact was displayed or the context of its presentation.[237] The photographic database of the museum holds one image that depicts the chandelier as installed on display at the SMK exhibition (Figure 37).

237   In many cases couriers, usually conservators and art handlers that accompany the work during the transport and install on external exhibitions, do not stay until all pieces are assembled on display. In consequence, they often do not have the possibility of documenting the final result of the installation process.

The museum has built a close relationship with Vo over time. From the outset SMK played an important role in promoting Vo's work and invited him to participate in numerous shows, both group and solo.[238] According to the employees of the institution interviewed during the course of this research, the artist was involved in all of the museum's activities related to the artwork in question, including acquisition, consecutive displays and loans. Although SMK maintains close ties with the artists represented in its collection, especially those from the local scene, systematic interviewing for documentation or conservation purposes is not a common practice, neither within the framework of the curatorial team nor the conservation department. The former operates in a more spontaneous way, discussing with artists issues related to the possible ways that their works might be displayed during the install. Marianne Torp describes these discussions as follows:

> There is this knowledge, every time we are installing a more complicated piece, I speak to Louise, I speak to Morten [AW: the conservator and the art-handler], hey, how are we doing, how was it? But I think we are not [...] very systematic in actually writing down notes from those discussions that we have every time we invite an artist to reinstall his or her work [...] because there are a lot of decisions and considerations obviously taking place when you are installing and discussing a piece, and that should be documented. Now it is not documented, it is just happening. And then you have to do it all over again. [...] And I think that should be something that I should do more systematically. Document the conversations that you have with the artist about the work and about the installation of it. Definitely, I am just totally exhausted, in thinking how to have a conversation, take notes, write, type-write them afterwards, it seems quite ... you know a lot about it. (M. Torp, in-person interview, September 20, 2017)

Thus, although the conservator acknowledges the importance of collecting artists' statements, due to time constraints she is only able to consult with artists in relation to the practicalities of particular conservation treatments.

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238 Vo is considered a Danish artist and SMK, as a national museum, is responsible for representing his oeuvre in its collection. Besides *08:03:51, 28.05.2009*, SMK holds several other pieces by the artist.

That was my original intention, that I am going to do a lot of artist interviews, and I did a couple of artist interviews […] then, […] my relationship with artists became like, more hands-on, 'Come to the workshop and let's have a talk', […] and then I will take notes and include them in a condition report for example instead of doing like a formal interview. […] I found that those kind of interviews are more useful, because I could use them for a specific work. Because general oeuvre interviews are very time consuming and, you have to do a lot of research, a lot of work and I just never have the time to do it. So then instead of getting frustrated about it I just thought, well I am going to do problem-based interviews. So that if I have something in workshop I'll just call the artist and say: hey can you come in, […] and then while they are there, usually I'll ask them a couple of questions about other things if I have something I want to know. So my original intention to do like a lot of artist interviews in a systematic way never really happened and it's a time issue. It's time and resources actually. (L. Cone, in-person interview, September 14, 2017)

Even though Vo was never 'officially' interviewed by the curator or the conservator, some of the stories related to the 'Chandeliers Project' have nevertheless been documented by the institution. Just after the acquisition of *08:03:51, 28.05.2009* the museum produced a 4:30 minute-long video about the piece in which Vo tells the history of its conception. The film comprises fragments of the recording of Vo's lecture at his Alma Mater, the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, combined with shots showing the chandelier being assembled upon its arrival at the museum.[239] In this lecture, Vo speaks about his father's role in setting the artwork's meanings, and the importance of the effect the chandeliers were intended to have on people. The video clip was produced for educational purposes and made accessible via SMK's website.[240] The full, unedited version of the recording is not available within the museum's holdings.[241]

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239 See: Danh Vo - 08:03:51, 28.05.2009. (2012). Denmark: Statens Museum for Kunst. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fDf6M5aCNy.

240 As of late 2017.

241 This instance has been confirmed during the research [L. Cone, personal communication, 20 September 20, 2017].

The display setting of the chandelier is addressed directly in one of the documents related to the acquisition. The database that contains the 'official' museum correspondence stores various emails exchanged between the gallery that handled the sale of the chandelier and the SMK curator. The process of negotiations spans across ten emails, towards the end of which the gallery informs the curator that the sale can only be finalized pursuant to a condition set out by the artist. According to the gallerist, Vo has requested to be directly involved in choosing the space where the piece will be installed.[242] In the interview conducted during this research, Marianne Torp, who led the negotiations on behalf of the museum, was asked to comment on this conversation.

> AW: Was it a real condition for acquiring this piece?

> MT: No, it was just a little power game. Or power joke, I think. I was bargaining the price and conditions, so they said: ok, we accept it, but then Danh wants to choose where to place it. I could have imagined that he at that point would think it should be at the HammershøI room or something like that.[243] And then we spoke, I guess, and then we ended up in this space upstairs. (M. Torp, in-person interview, September 20, 2017).

Upon acquisition the piece was not accompanied by any instructions regarding its presentation, and the way the chandelier should be displayed is not discussed in any of the documents encountered during my research. Nevertheless, the institution does have a clear view regarding the available possibilities. According to Torp, *08:03:51, 28.05.2009* can be installed in the future in any way possible. When asked if it can be presented disassembled lying on the floor, the way that the chandelier from MoMA is usually installed, she responded: "I would be totally open to having it displayed like that" (M. Torp, in-person interview, September 20, 2017). Later in the conversation, Torp developed on the issue, explaining the way she might approach future displays of the piece:

> AW: So in your opinion, the way each chandelier might be displayed is not fixed, and there is a possibility to play with that.

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242 Bortolozzi, I. (2011, June 9). [Email to Marianne Torp]. SMK Archive, Copenhagen; Torp, M. (2011, June 14). [Email to Isabella Bortolozzi]. SMK Archive, Copenhagen.

243 Vilhelm Hammershøi (1864-1916) is one of the best-known Danish painters internationally.

MT: I think so. But I would definitely involve him. I would never decide myself.

AW: If you planned to install this piece once again here, at SMK, would you consult the artist about where and how to place it?

MT: I think I would suggest him a location. Hey, we want to display it again, I was thinking to show it that way ... and we would discuss it. Maybe he would not agree with me, he often has different ideas. (M. Torp, in-person interview, September 20, 2017)

Museum of Modern Art, New York

At MoMA *26.05.2009, 8:43* is part of the Paintings and Sculpture Collection, and as such falls under the responsibilities of a sculpture conservator. For all museum collections the documents related to the artworks are managed by the Archive Department, which compiles them into Object Files, accessible by external researchers through the Study Center. Object Files are divided into two parts: while the first can be accessed on demand, the second is covered by a confidentiality clause.[244] With regard to *26.05.2009, 8:43*, the part open to external researchers contains only one document with attachments, namely a proposal for the acquisition of three works by Vo authored by two curators.[245] The proposal includes a basic description of the artwork, a short history illustrated with photographs of previous ways it has been displayed, and the justification of the request.

While the limited access to information stood in the way of assessing both the body of documentation on Vo's work and the institutional documentation strategy as a whole, some insights into MoMA's practices were provided by museum employees interviewed during the fieldwork. According to Associate Curator in the Department of Drawings, Christian Rattemeyer, the documentation of artworks from the collection

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244 The description of the way the collection-related documentation is structured is based on the author's own experiences, information obtained from museum employees during in-person interviews, and information found online on MoMA's website.

245 The Museum of Modern Art Collection Records, Painting and Sculpture, file number 394.2010, The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. The title of the document: Dossier for Fund for the Twenty-First Century Proposals.

aims to cover four different categories of documents. The first is the correspondence between a curator and an artist related to the acquisition of the artwork. The second consists of all sources – articles, catalogue essays, etc. – that the curator consulted while researching the piece.[246] The third category is the official documentation produced during the process of accessioning an artwork to the collection and throughout the whole institutional life of the object.[247] The fourth one is the artist's own contribution, gathered by means of a questionnaire:

> And the last thing is, and we've only been doing that for about a decade or 15 years or so, is that we send out questionnaires to the artist to say, 'Please tell us more about this object'. And some artists are very good and very detailed, other artists are not detailed at all, and don't send it back or send it back minimally filled out. So that is information that is entirely in the volition of the artist. (C. Rattemeyer, in-person interview, July 14, 2017)

When asked about the practice of interviewing artists, Rattemeyer mentioned the MoMA Oral History Program (see: Chapter 1, p. 60). Documents produced and/or gathered by a curator during or prior to the accession of the piece (the correspondence and the sources consulted for research purposes) are at a certain point collected by the Collection Specialist, who organises the provided documentation into the Object File.[248]

The Conservation Department has its own separate archive, and the documentation they produce is not included in the Object File. However, the conservators and curators work in close collaboration, so there is overlap between the files produced by the two

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246 "So if there was an Artforum article that I've read, if there was a catalogue that I've used – all of that stuff usually gets photocopied and stuck in the file" (C. Rattemeyer, in-person interview, July 14, 2017).

247 "Bids of gifts, bids of sales, invoices, copies of [...] receipts, and then we have two documents that the artist is signing, which is the NLE (Non-exclusive licence agreement) which gives MoMA the non-exclusive right to use the work, to document the work, to use the documentation for websites and catalogues, [...] communication, press" (C. Rattemeyer, in-person interview, July 14, 2017).

248 "After every round of acquisitions we would get an email from the Collection Specialist saying, 'Please give me all of your material that you've consulted, if you have bibliography, if you have photocopies, if you have website URLs, just send it to me, I will document it and I will put it in the object file'" (C. Rattemeyer, in-person interview, July 14, 2017).

departments for each artwork. The description of the conservation documentation practices provided by Kate Lewis, Chief Conservator at MoMA's David Booth Conservation Department, starts with the museum's CMS, which, interestingly, does not appear in Rattemeyer's account.

> There is TMS, which is MoMA's Collection Management System.249
> This is a central place for collection and tracking information, which is
> the traditional practice across museums. One artwork, for example, might
> have multiple components (especially true for contemporary works), and
> you can track the location of all these components. TMS has multiple
> modules, which allows for associated information to be connected to each
> artwork. Conservation now actively uses the Conservation module in
> TMS to document different conservation activities, and is available to users
> across the Museum. No doubt common to all conservation departments,
> we also have paper records dating back to 1958, when the department
> was established; therefore today we have a mixture of paper artwork files,
> electronic artwork files, TMS, and conservation-related images stored
> in MoMA's digital asset management system as part of our conservation
> documentation ecosystem. (K. Lewis, in-person interview, July 14, 2017)

When asked if MoMA's conservation department does artist's interviews, Lewis confirmed unambiguously:

> Conservation regularly conduct artists' interviews, which is now an
> embedded practice in contemporary art conservation. We collaborate with
> colleagues across the MoMA, including with curators, registrars, the AV
> team and exhibition designers. We may conduct one interview, we may
> have a series of interviews, depending on the artwork, the artist and related
> stakeholders. Interviews can also be re-visited over time, each time a work is
> installed it potentially provides an opportunity to revisit. It is an ongoing and
> collaborative discussion. (K. Lewis, in-person interview, July 14, 2017)

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249   TMS (The Museum System) is one of the popular Collections Management Systems (see: https://www.gallerysystems.com/products-and-services/tms-suite/tms/).

At MoMA, access to artist's interviews is conditioned by the artist's consent. While some of them are conceived for public use, others are meant exclusively for the internal use of the institution. When asked if Vo might have been interviewed about *26.05.2009, 8:43*, Lewis responded that the decision to interview an artist depends upon a number of aspects, from the availability of the artist or their representative, to the extent of the documentation collected so far, including email correspondence with an artist, as well as more widely available resources. It is important to note that Lewis specialises in the conservation of time-based media art, and within her discipline it is established practice to document artworks by means of the interview.[250]

Although due to the confidentiality policy it was difficult to ascertain whether or not there were artist's interviews with Vo, and to examine how his voice shows up in the museum's documentation, some of Vo's stories about *26.05.2009, 8:43* were found within the museum's online resources. In 2010, as a part of the series of public talks called Conversations with Contemporary Artists, MoMA organized an Artist Talk presenting Vo in conversation with Julie Ault (Vo & Ault, 2010). The recording of this talk, cited extensively throughout this chapter, is available through the museum website and is one of the main sources for Vo's statements about the artwork, its history and the artist's approach to the issue of variable manifestations.

Since its acquisition for the collection, the chandelier owned by MoMA has only been put on view twice.[251] The first time it was presented in a group show featuring only two of Vo's pieces, and whereas the artist was not involved directly in the planning of the display, he was consulted about all curatorial choices related to the presentation of his works.[252] The second one was Vo's solo show at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville

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250   The practice of interviewing artists within the framework of MoMA's time-based media conservation was described by Lewis in a public lecture during the 2017 MAPS conference in Budapest, see: Lewis, 2017.

251   As of December 2017. All three chandeliers were presented in the retrospective exhibition *Take My Breath Away* held first at the Guggenheim Museum in New York (February 9 – May 9, 2018) and subsequently at the SMK in Copenhagen (30 August – 2 December 2018), which started after the empirical part of this research ended.

252   Ibidem p. 8. Exhibition *I Am Still Alive: Politics and Everyday Life in Contemporary Drawing*.

de Paris, and in this instance all arrangements were made directly by the artist.[253] Christian Rattemeyer, the curator of the MoMA show, recalled his collaboration with the artist and his impression from both shows as follows:

> I sent him the floor plan [...] but basically, there was just one space, that was not very big, it was maybe 5 x 5 m, or maybe 7 x 7 m. [...] It [the chandelier] was on these blankets in Berlin. And I said if you want to do that again. And at the end he wasn't so happy with the blankets, and [he said] it should be shown just on the floor. Which we did. [...] Whereas in Paris, it was in a huge space, kind of totally spread out. So it really is, however you want to lay it out. (C. Rattemeyer, in-person interview, July 14, 2017)

When asked if the MoMA piece has an assigned display format, or can be shown in any other possible way, Rattemeyer responded:

> My sense is that there is probably a minimum and maximum guideline. And probably asking the artist you would get a different answer, but as far as I know, there is no specific instruction how it is to be shown. [...] As far as I know, if we went to Danh and said, 'Hey, we would like to reassemble the chandelier and hang it from the ceiling', he would probably say, 'Ok, go ahead'. I think we wouldn't do that, but there is nothing in my conversation or communication with the artist that suggests that that would not be possible. (C. Rattemeyer, in-person interview, July 14, 2017)

Centre Pompidou, Paris

The Department of Collections of the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Pompidou is divided into sub-departments based on the artist's date of birth and the medium of the work.[254] The section responsible for Vo's *16:32:15–26.05.2009* is called *Service de la création contemporaine et prospective,* which covers works by artists born

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253   Ibidem, p. 8. Exhibition *Go Mo Ni Ma Da.*

254   The French name of the organizational unit that is responsible for collections is Conservation des Collections Arts Plastiques. It is divided into seven subunits: Modern Collections, Contemporary Collections, Contemporary and Prospective Creation, Graphic Art, Photography, Experimental Film, New Media and Conservation (Service de la restauration). See: http://mediation.centrepompidou.fr/organisation/organigramme.pdf.

after 1960 and consists of four employees. Two of them are curators, while the position of the other two is designated as *attaché*. One of them is involved in the organization of exhibitions, while the other, the *attaché de conservation,* works mostly with artworks from the collection. This role is worthy of attention, as, similarly to MoMA's Collection Specialist, it covers research on and documentation of collected artworks. According to Pamela Sticht, who has held this position for eight years, the *attaché de conservation* gathers documentation on the artwork prior to, during and after accession.

In terms of documentation, Centre Pompidou works with paper Object Files. These are available to researchers on demand and can be consulted via the Documentation Specialist.[255] The latter is responsible for keeping and organizing information gathered by the *attaché.* In the case of *16:32:15–26.05.2009* the first page of the File consists of basic information about an artwork extracted from the museum CMS. The following parts include photographic documentation of the piece together with technical information, e.g. measurements, exhibition history illustrated with images, press releases from consecutive shows, and articles in which the story of the 'Chandeliers Project' is mentioned. An interesting section in the File, especially from the perspective of this research, is titled 'analogies'. It gathers information related to similar works by the same artist, and in the case of Vo's piece consists of information on shows that included other chandeliers, for instance, extracts from the catalogue of the exhibition *Where The Lions Are,* where the piece from the SMK was shown for the first time. The File also contains a confidential portion, which in this case consists of contracts, loan agreements, information related to the value and current location of the piece, as well as the correspondence with the former owner and the artist.[256]

Artists are usually consulted during acquisition, which, according to Sticht, at Pompidou is a two-step process. Curators propose artworks to be purchased during the round of acquisitions and then all agree on a closed, common list. After that

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255   Namely: Documentarist (Documentaliste principale/Responsable des dossiers d'œuvres).

256   There are special conditions that have influenced the content of the File on *16:32:15–26.05.2009* that make it an atypical example of Pompidou's documentation workflow. As mentioned before, Vo's piece was accessioned to the collection only in 2016 as a donation and a part of a large private collection. Accordingly, at the time the research was conducted the record was still under construction.

phase, each artwork is carefully researched by the *attaché*. This involves collecting all available documentation from the broker – usually the gallery or the former owner, as in the case of Vo's piece. Then the work is shipped to and installed in the museum to be presented to the acquisition committee for the final say. This first, pre-accession install is an ideal setting to invite artists and engage them in the conversation about the process of introducing their work to the institutional collection. When asked about the practice of interviewing artists, Sticht responded:

> PS: Yes, of course, we do it, each time we buy something.
>
> AW: How does it work in the day-to-day practice?
>
> PS: It depends if they [artists] are available or not. [...] For example, we are having an artwork coming into the collection sold by Christie's. I am writing to the artist asking him all the relevant, complementary information, and then seeing whether he is really open or not. Now I saw he is very open so maybe we can even meet and ... often they are coming for the first installation, and it is perfect, because then I can just ask all the questions I need.
>
> AW: Are you recording these conversations?
>
> PS: No, I am writing them down, I am doing reports.
> (P. Sticht, in-person interview, November 12, 2017)

Conservators divided according to their material-related specialisations produce their own documentation, which is shared with other organizational units via the CMS but not included in the Object File. When asked about the general involvement of conservators in the documentation process, Sticht responded: "If they have some questions, they would ask me. If there is a loan request, they would ask me or consult the file" (P. Sticht, in-person interview, November 12, 2017).

Contrary to interviewees from the other two institutions discussed above, when asked about the possibility of displaying the Pompidou chandelier dismantled, the way the piece from MoMA is usually shown, Sticht responded without hesitation:

> PS: [...] We don't think it is possible.
>
> AW: And what is your opinion about the possible future way of installing the piece?

PS: Of course, now as we own the piece, and taking into account what he already did [in the past], we would always suggest that it is advisable to do it the same way. If there is another way, then we really have to see whether it is possible or not.

AW: And what would be the factor to decide? Technical reasons, security reasons?

PS: Conservation reasons, also. [...] The issue is that if we receive a piece like this, we think that it should always be like this. For example, we have another artist who did an installation in Palais de Tokyo once, and we bought the piece. We had an information that this piece is meant to be evolving, so we are still working on framing the whole thing, so that is not exploding.

AW: So what you are trying to do is to control the situation.

PS: Yes. In some way, that is why I say that it is very important to have the documentation right when you do the acquisition. To really be clear how to actually define the freedom of the artist. It is more this kind of question actually. As soon as you get it [the artwork] in the collection, [...] it is of course, very enthusiastic to know that each time [we display the artwork] there can be some freedom and creativity, at the same time it is also something, if he really wants to be creative maybe he should do another piece, you know what I mean. It is very difficult to know. To find a balance. (P. Sticht, in-person interview, November 12, 2017)

3.5.3   Summary of the Case Study

This comparative analysis of the documentation strategies of three institutional keepers of Vo's chandeliers has revealed dissimilarities in the way the artwork-related documentation is conceptualised and organised at the different museums. Two of them use the Object File as a basic unit to compile documentation on an artwork that would otherwise be dispersed among different institutional archives, and therefore difficult to access and analyse all together. The use of the Object File at both institutions is linked to the position of the documentarist, a person whose main responsibility is to research artworks from the collection. The Object Files from Pompidou and MoMA contain images of the artwork's previous manifestations, both of the piece that is a part of the collection as well as the other two chandeliers. None of the Object Files includes documentation produced by the conservation department.

In all past exhibitions of the musealised chandeliers, the artist was always consulted or directly involved in deciding how the artwork would be displayed. In most of the cases, these decisions were conditioned by the circumstances of the setting and made in collaboration with the host institutions, both during in-house shows as well as in instances of external loans. Whereas at SMK this process was not recorded in the institutional documentation, at the other two institutions it might be traced through the correspondence between the artist and curators kept in the confidential portion, which, however, was not made accessible for the purposes of my research. The approach to consulting artists about their works varies from institution to institution. The curator and the conservator from SMK do not conduct artist interviews due to constraints related to time and resources, but both work with artists on an everyday basis and acknowledge the importance of such collaboration and its documentation. The joint work with artists is recorded in the documentation in the form of notes (conservation department) or not recorded at all (curatorial department). The other two institutions affirm that artist interviews are a part of their regular practice. At MoMA interviews seem to be mostly an initiative of the conservation department, and are especially common in relation to caring for media art. Centre Pompidou understands all consultations with artists as interviews, and similarly to SMK these are included in the documentation in the form of reports. Unlike MoMA, at Pompidou conservators are not involved in this process.

None of the institutions conducted an artist interview in relation to the 'Chandeliers Project'.[257] However, in at least two institutions the broad scope of activities, mostly related to education and outreach, allowed for the inclusion in their holdings of some of the artist's stories, classified as significant for the understanding of the artwork in previous sections of this chapter. The artist's strategy in regard to informing the public about the work through the use of brass plaques is documented in the archive of Centre Pompidou.[258] Finally, the approach to possible future presentations of the artwork differs from institution to institution. The curator from SMK considers that

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257   With regards to MoMA this is only an inference. However, I assume that if the artist were invited for consultation, the curator responsible for acquisition and display of the piece would be involved, or at least informed about the undertaking.

258   The photographs of the brass plate from the exhibition *Preis der Nationalgalerie für junge Kunst* are included in the Object File.

their chandelier has no fixed form of display and can be shown in any possible way. The representative of MoMA opines similarly, but would rather avoid proposing as an option any other way of displaying than the one applied before. The stance of Centre Pompidou differs in this respect, and the institution tends to narrow down the possibilities, preferring to follow one fixed mode of display.

While this dissertation advocates for documentation as a tool that allows for the preservation of the inherent changeability of the contemporary artwork, two issues encountered during this investigation showed that this tool needs to be used with caution. The first one is linked to the acquisition-related correspondence studied in the archives of SMK. The text of the letter stating that Vo is interested in choosing the space where the chandelier is to be installed might be interpreted in the future as an instruction to be followed – an indication that there is actually a special spot at the museum where the artwork must be shown. Only a single comment by Marianne Torp, made during an interview conducted with the author and therefore not recorded in the institutional archive, serves to rectify this conviction. The second one is the statement given by Pamela Sticht concerning the documentation Centre Pompidou collects around the moment of acquisition. While speaking about the processes of framing artworks for institutional purposes, she mentioned that the documentation provides the institution with the means to achieve this goal. These instances demonstrate the power over the artwork's shape that rests with documentation. Firstly, they prove that if even a single piece of information becomes disconnected from the main body of artwork-related documentation it can lead to unintended consequences. Secondly, they show that documentation, which throughout this book is presented as a means to keep the artwork open, might also be used for the opposite purpose: to fix the artwork's shape so as to make it 'manageable' for the institution.

The interviews conducted at MoMA have shown that the comprehension of the notion of documentation as well as related tools varies within the institution and depends on the position of the interviewee and the way the artwork has been classified. Rattemeyer's account of what MoMA's documentation consists of does not include the technical infrastructure that carries the information, such as the CMS or Digital Asset Management mentioned by Lewis. While the former speaks more about content, the latter focuses on form. Another difference is the approach to the practice

of interviewing artists for conservation purposes – while the conservator asserts that interviews are conducted on a daily basis, the curator does not mention them at all. This might be related to the different scopes of interest of the two – compared with time-based media, in Prints and Drawings documentation might be of minor concern. However, as Rattemeyer himself noticed, besides traditionally understood drawings and prints, the latter collection also includes many conceptual pieces classified by medium.[259] Lewis noted differences in the approach to interviewing among the various conservation specialisations, which triggered a question as to whether, if the 'Chandeliers Project' had been classified as some medium other than sculpture, its chances of having the artist's stories be documented through an interview would have been higher.

259   Such as works by Douglas Huebler. In the interview conducted by the author, Rattemeyer noted that medium as a classification principle is contingent upon many different factors: "Those variable pieces [by Huebler] in which a kind of a location in the city gets designated by a photo of that location, a description of the geographical properties of that location gets typed up, and these three elements – the map, the photo and the description – get sort of mounted together into one work. In the 1970s the work of that series was acquired by the Department of Painting and Sculpture, under the idea of sculpture in the expanded field [...]. In the 1980s one work was acquired by the Department of Photography because they said this is a conceptual way of using photography to execute an artwork that exists in another field. In the early 2000s, one was acquired by the Department of Drawings because it was a collage – various things glued together on a piece of paper" (C. Rattemeyer, in-person interview, July 14, 2017).

3.6   A Bundle of Relations: Conserving collections of documents and stories

Despite his object-based practice, Vo is frequently categorised in the literature as a 'performance art inspired conceptual artist', and although this classification is far from precise, it points towards a perspective to adopt while studying his objects.[260] Vo's chandeliers, although indisputably unique and 'auratic' like traditional art pieces, are not artworks in and of themselves. They act rather as expressive means that transmit the artist's narratives: Katrine Brinson has even called them 'storytellers' (Brinson, 2018). Despite being at the centre of the artwork, without the contextual and complementary information, these objects, however impressive, are just common decorative elements from the history of interior design. What makes them an artwork is the artist's gesture of selecting them and embedding in them stories through which he communicates his interests and concerns. Following this line of thought, these stories are as indispensable for the artwork's identity as the objects that represent it.

3.6.1   Art Objects as Documents and Documents as Artworks

The concept of the project, as introduced at the beginning of this chapter, not only enabled us to examine the notion of contemporary art from a new perspective, but also to emphasise the distinct role of objects in contemporary art and support the assumption that art objects might be considered documents. As Boris Groys (2002) observed, the art project's goals are usually established in such a way that they cannot be evaluated as having been reached or not; in other words, one can never say whether the project has achieved what it was supposed to achieve (Kunst, 2014). In consequence, the project as a formula shifts the attention away from the result and toward the process, and this affects the way art might be defined (Groys, 2002b). Based on this stance, art might be understood not as the 'result-oriented' production of works of art but rather as documentation of the project. In consequence, in exhibition spaces the audience may encounter not only artworks in the traditional sense of the word but also documents,

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260   See e.g.: *Excessivism - A Phenomenon Every Art Collector Should Know*, Retrieved March 15, 2018, from https://www.widewalls.ch/excessivism-art-movement/. This designation also appears in the artist's biography on Wikipedia.

which can often take the same forms and be exhibited in similar media in which art is commonly presented. The application of this theoretical approach to Vo's 'Chandeliers Project' allows the status of the artefacts collected to be shifted so as to place them on equal footing with other documents produced during the project.

The consideration of the artwork studied in this chapter as a project raises a question related to its beginning and end. While the beginning might be associated with the start of Vo's interest in the former Hôtel Majestic, the end point is debatable. Formally, the project understood as the artistic activities carried out by Vo during his residency culminated with the exhibition at Kadist. However, as the stories presented here have demonstrated, this event was only one stage in the artwork's career. Accordingly, for the 'Chandeliers Project' the concept of project might need to be expanded to later institutional stages of the artwork's 'life' and embrace its subsequent manifestations, whereby it could be considered as ongoing and never-ending.

The example of Vo's 'Chandeliers Project' has shown that the identity, and likewise the legibility, of a contemporary artwork does not necessarily lie in the objects as such, but rather in the stories which the artist communicates through them and in relation to them. And yet, the collection-related practices of the chandeliers' institutional keepers remain focused on "the original, unique, authentic product of the artist's unique self and creative agency" (Domínguez Rubio, 2014). Hence, the stories that complement the objects and make them a part of the artwork are undervalued and often cast aside. The museums' historically justifiable object-oriented approach entails that the artworks be acquired as objects, or in other words 'objectified', because their objecthood renders them exhibitable and circuitable within the traditional museum and art-market structure. As a result of the object-oriented classification principles at all of the museums studied during this investigation, the chandeliers themselves were classified as art and included in the collection, while the stories, as non-art with (mere) historical or research value, were either archived or, in many cases, were not even included in the museum holdings in any form.

To summarize, as a consequence of art museums' current classification principles, upon crossing the threshold of the museum realm a contemporary artwork is distributed between the collection and various institutional archives. The art objects enter the collection while other documents get dispersed between archives – both institutionally endorsed ones like that of the conservation department, and semi-private ones like that of a curator. One can observe this process clearly in the example of *08:03:51, 28.05.2009* and SMK. The documentation that holds the stories related to the artwork can be found in the photographic database (documentation of the in-house installation setting), the database that holds the 'official' correspondence (negotiations of acquisition and loan conditions), Danh Vo's record in the 'artists archive', and finally the two archives mentioned before – the conservation department archive and the curator's archive. The key story for the understanding of the artistic concept – Vo's father's visit to the former Hôtel Majestic – exists within the museum holdings in the form of a short video kept on the institutional server, which is an unsecure repository from the perspective of preservation. Other stories, like the one related to the selection and acquisition of the gantry, were, before conducting this research, still present merely in the memory of the museum employees involved in the process. Furthermore, the information related to the artwork held within the archives is organised according to different principles and is not interlinked. Only some of these archives are stable, structured sets while others are more volatile and contingent.

Collections are at the core of art museums' identity and in consequence institutions allocate an important part of their resources to their maintenance and care. Thanks to developments in science, refined preventive methods of care for material objects ensure their longevity for hundreds of years. In the meantime, the collection-related documentation is usually undervalued within the hierarchy of museum priorities, often spread across different and frequently unstable archives. The division of an artwork between the collection and archives poses a challenge to an artwork's conservation because the entire 'artwork constituency' is indispensable not only for the legibility of the work but also for informed decision making related to the artwork's possible futures. This statement is valid for both notions of conservation, whether the specifically object-oriented one or the expanded one as defined in the conclusions of Chapter 2. In the first case, the informed decisions related to possible interventions like cleaning, replacement of bulbs, rewiring or reconstruction of prisms would be based

on the entire 'artwork constituency'. In the second one, the whole body of artwork-related documentation constitutes a reference point for ascertaining potential ways of presenting the work. That does not mean that in the case of contemporary art the art objects as a part of the 'artwork constituency' require any less attention than the objects of traditional art, but rather that other documents deserve equal consideration in terms of care and conservation.

How can contemporary artworks be collected without having to revolutionise the traditional concept of the museum built around a collection of objects? A helpful gateway to address this question is the notion of 'artwork constituency' borrowed from Domínguez Rubio and expanded in the introduction to this chapter (see: p. 186). In the case of the 'Chandeliers Project' the 'artwork constituency' consist of all three chandeliers, their subsequent presentations including all the auxiliary objects, such as the gantry, the pallet and the rack, as well as all the stories that complement, explain and contextualise them. What if instead of classifying the chandeliers as sculptures, the racks as props and the stories as documents, the entire constituency were accessioned to the collection as one inseparable entity, cared for and conserved as such?

Thinking about the entire 'Chandeliers Project' as one artwork does not entail that it cannot be owned by various institutions. All tangible components might be collected as representations, i.e. in the form of documents. In practical terms, it means that the artwork in the collection of SMK would consist of physical objects, such as the largest chandelier and the gantry, while other objects, such as two further chandeliers and props, could be represented there through drawings, photographs or descriptions. The stories might be collected in a variety of forms – as videos, audios, texts, etc. Given the opportunities afforded in this sense by new technologies, digital objects can stand in for both physical and intangible documents. Moreover, if the stories where afforded an importance on par with the corresponding art objects, more resources and effort would need to be allocated to collecting them, not only prior to and during acquisition, but also later on, over the entire institutional career of the artwork. That would involve more research and documentation, transforming these aspects into primary instruments for collecting, caring and conserving.

The auxiliary notion of 'artwork constituency' might be seen as the seed of what was defined in Chapter 1 as a model of artwork-related documentation. Both constitute the identity of an artwork and are inseparable from what the artwork is. Both conceptualise art objects as documents and are based on the premise that to collect, care for and conserve contemporary artworks, institutions need to find a way to bridge the domains of archive and collection. This chapter suggests that this can be done through the inclusion of the entire 'artwork constituency', or artwork-related documentation, in the museum collection. Yet, while the 'artwork constituency' is a rather stable entity, the model of artwork-related documentation based on Briet's theory is regarded as a dynamic set where particular documents need to be activated in order to interrelate with each other. Stimulating this 'aliveness' requires conceptual and technical tools and infrastructure, and this issue and related challenges will be scrutinized in the following chapters (see: Chapter 5).

3.6.2   Objects that Speak through Stories

The study described in this chapter was conceived as the preparatory research for a face-to-face artist interview with Vo. Nevertheless, as with everyday practice at museums, this investigation had to be adapted to the circumstances. At the point when the data had been collected and analysed, and the script for the interview fully prepared, it turned out that the artist would not available for the rest of the timeframe assigned to the research project. This condition redirected the focus of the study to the existing talks and interviews, accessible as audio and video recordings or in the form of published text. As it turned out, all of the questions posed in the script prepared for the interview were addressed in the collected utterances by the artist.

Vo's stories gathered for this study convey information essential for an in-depth understanding of the artwork and partake in defining its identity. Firstly, they describe the creative processes behind the artwork – how the idea emerged to make the chandeliers the protagonists of the piece and how it continued to develop later on. They expose the process of taking on meanings, the conceptual significance of the titles, present Vo's uneasiness with the idea of converting the chandeliers into cultural souvenirs or personally fetishized objects, and his desire for the work's interpretation to be open-ended. They provide insights into Vo's approach towards the installation of

the chandeliers for display by showing that his decisions, although not premeditated but rather contingent on context and practically oriented, are a part of the creative process ("trying things out"). In the stories one can see that these choices have the potential to sanction new meanings and therefore need to be studied and understood on a case-by-case basis. Secondly, Vo's statements and opinions combined with the study of his artistic practice, and particularly of the way he interacts with collecting institutions, make it possible to identify the conceptual, contextual and processual dimensions of the 'Chandeliers Project', as well as its potential media-variability. The latter feature is related to the capacity of the artwork to be presented in various forms, for instance, through three different chandeliers, but also catalogues and interviews understood as exhibition spaces. Thirdly, the juxtaposition of the artist's stories with those provided by various institutional representatives reveals information about the history, role and possible uses of additional elements in the display. Still, all these stories gathered together do not grant direct solutions to the conservation problems defined in this chapter, but rather offer a basis for informed decision making.

The analysis of the artist's stories has demonstrated once again that these need to be contextualised and complemented by the accounts of other parties involved in the artwork's career. This point was already observed in the previous stage of the research on Mirosław Bałka, where the report of the conservator and the correspondence held in the museum archive revealed information essential for understanding the nature of the studied artwork. This time, however, the sources were not available in the archive, but instead needed to be uncovered through fieldwork, mainly through interviews with the facilitators and keepers of the 'Chandeliers Project'. And as the last paragraph shows, only the combination and juxtaposition of all of these stories makes it possible to grasp the artwork's identity and draw conclusions regarding the conservation problem. Consequently, as this research has shown, the artist's statements and opinions act within the artwork-related documentation as initiators of interactions between all the documents, transforming the stable set into a dynamic entity. The goal of the artist interview as presented in Chapter 1 is the assemblage of stories for further interpretation. In line with this perspective, whereas collected utterances are no substitute for an actual interview, to a certain extent they can be seen as such. Would the artist interview contribute to the artwork's documentation something different than the stories collected from artist talks and conversations with third parties? In my

opinion, besides complementing the information gathered previously, it could serve as a guide for its methodological evaluation and future usage, and these two functions will be studied further in the next chapter of this book.

Objects in contemporary art rarely speak by themselves. In order to begin signifying, they need a translation, mediation and interpretation "between the language of things and that of people" (see: opening quote on p. 114). Similarly, in forensic anthropology, bones become evidence of the past only if the information they carry is read, interpreted and publicly presented. For an artwork like Vo's 'Chandeliers Project' the discourse is provided with the means of *prosopopeia* by different solo voices joined into a choir through the forum of the museum. However, besides acting as forums to make an argument before the public, museums need to amplify and record these stories – actively collecting them by means of research and preserving them for the public of the future.

3.6.3   Conservation Problem: Final remarks

The study of the artist's stories has confirmed that the artwork in question is both performative and open-ended. Therefore, at least at this stage of its career, there is no need to restrain the 'Chandeliers Project' by freezing it within one particular mode of display for each chandelier, something which most of the artwork's keepers intuitively seem to understand. However, their opinions vary depending on their experience and familiarity with Vo's work and the character of their relationship with the artist. The longer and closer Vo's collaboration with the institution, the higher its confidence in his choices and decisions. Nevertheless, the situation of the current keepers is privileged because they have access to the artist and can back up their choices by giving him a say in them. This fact is acknowledged among decision-makers conscious of problems that will have to be faced in the future. During independently conducted interviews, two curators from different institutions, Rattemeyer and Torp, identified choices related to the presentation of contemporary artworks as a challenge:

> I can only talk about other instances where [...] we have an artwork, and the artist says: you can install it whichever way you want. Nothing scares the museum more than the instruction 'install it whichever way you want'. Who is going to make that decision? (C. Rattemeyer, in-person interview, July 14, 2017)

Figure 47. Danh Vo, *16:32:15–26.05.2009*. Installation view of the permanent collection at Centre Pompidou, Paris (November 2017). Photographer: A. B. Wielocha.

> I haven't really been in a situation when I had to work from those [artists'] specifications, without the artist being there. Because that is really the scariest part, as a curator, you know … what do you actually do? You are ending up making decisions, which are normally the artist's decisions, and that is frightening. (M. Torp, in-person interview, September 20, 2017)

In the permanent exhibition of Pompidou's collection, the chandelier is displayed in the middle of a room, suspended in two parts from the metal rack (Figure 47). The rosette is placed on the lower bar of the rack and the chain suspended from the upper one. The bulbs are not lit and the shadows on the gallery floor are produced by artificial, general illumination. The label on the wall states:

> *16:32, 26.05.2009* is one of three chandeliers bought by the artist that used to hang in the ballroom of the Hôtel Majestic, where the Paris Accords were signed between Vietnam and the United States on 27 January 1973. This contemporary ready-made piece can be seen as a relic of a history

that invited scorn. Its ostentatious luxury mimics the vain pomp of the diplomatic occasion, indicating the West's efforts to "enlighten" the rest of the world.

Just behind the chandelier hangs a monumental painting depicting silhouettes of three half-naked soldiers firing machine guns. Painted by Léon Golub, it is titled *Vietnam I*. This particular presentation may be seen as contradictory to what Vo expresses as his intention regarding this piece. Surrounded by other striking art objects and from the outset classified as a statement on the Vietnam War, there is little space for the encounter to leave the public with a sense of awe. Contrary to Vo's wish, this display turns the chandelier into a 'cultural souvenir' and a 'reconciliation of history' (see: p. 183, 131). Once mysterious, here, bereft of its lighting, it resembles more a dead, dissected animal, the sad trophy of a hunter. And yet, I can nevertheless imagine Vo accepting this condition and happily agreeing to include it in the chandelier's biography, saying something along the lines of, 'I just think we should work with contradictions and what comes from them. That is also very productive. We shouldn't be so dogmatic, no?'[261]

My research on Vo's 'Chandeliers Project' finally did bring me to Vo's Berlin studio. Although the artist was not present at the time, I was able to interview studio manager Marta Lusena, which reaffirmed the assumption that the way all three chandeliers can be displayed rests only on the artist's decision. When asked the recurring question about whether it is possible to show the chandelier from SMK the same way as the piece from MoMA, she offered a firm answer:

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261   This imaginary statement is rooted in real interviews conducted with the artist. Originally these phrases are contextualized as follows:

DV: [commenting on his reluctance to include the story of his father's visit to the former Hôtel Majestic in the display of the chandeliers] It is such a good story. How should you add it into this cold white space…
JA: But you do it all the time with things […]; the information is in the work and in the spatial relationship. You do it yourself. Very effectively. DV: Yes, I know, I know. I do certain things. The thing is more than I think it [sic] differently. But I think that this is also very productive, we shouldn't be so dogmatic, no? [laughing] (Vo & Ault, 2010)

DV: I just think we should work with contradictions and what comes from them. (Maerkle, 2011)

ML: This is the artist's decision. You have to ask Danh about it. But as far as I know, none of those chandeliers has a fixed mode of display, every time it depends on the show and on the space. (M. Lusena, in-person interview, October 16, 2017)

Interestingly, at the time of my visit, Lusena was working on the technical specifications and guidelines for the installation of one of the chandeliers requested by its institutional keeper. When asked what kind of information she was planning to include in the document, she hesitated:

ML: What we can really provide right now is just the description of the way Danh installed it for the first time, but we will definitely include the very important sentence that says, 'For any future exhibition of the piece, please contact the artist'. Or the studio. (M. Lusena, in-person interview, October 16, 2017)

Which of course leaves us with the predicament that this dissertation seeks to remedy: What is to be done, then, when the artist is unavailable and, most importantly, when the artist is no longer alive?

Chapter 4

Barbara Kruger's Wall-Wraps:
The distributed artwork in the light
of the artist interview

KRUGER: I'm very pleased that people come to museums, and I'm convinced that a lot of people, if not most people, who go to museums don't know why they're there, except this strange need to affiliate with what they think is high-class "culcha." I don't go to museums very much, but every time I go I remember the kind of staging ground for power that they can be. I would be only too happy to – I'd love to – be in there to make other assertions and to plant some doubts and ask some questions. (W. Mitchell & Kruger, 1991, p. 444)

MITCHELL: There was one other question I wanted to ask you, and that's about interviews. The old idea about artists was that they weren't supposed to give interviews. The work was supposed to speak for itself. How do you feel about interviews?

KRUGER: I think that the work does speak for itself to some degree – absolutely. But I also feel that we're living in a time when an artist does not have to be interpreted by others. Artists can "have" words. So it's not like I think I'm going to blow my cover if I open my mouth. (W. Mitchell & Kruger, 1991, p. 448)

4.1 Introduction: Musealisation, quality of representation and the importance of research

When trying to understand why today's art museums are challenged by contemporary art and speculating on potential solutions to face this challenge, it is important to address the foundation of the museum as a concept. One of the persistent lines of critique towards the museum from the time of its inception in the late 18th century has been disagreement about whether artworks (or artefacts in general) should be isolated from their contexts in order to make them accessible to the public. For contemporary

art, where context plays a major role and has been indicated as one of its key features (see: Chapter 1), this critique seems to be even more relevant, resulting in a conflict seemingly impossible to resolve. How, then, can these two mutually exclusive concepts – contemporary art and museum – be brought together?

This chapter addresses this question by turning the museum's contested de-contextualisation into a virtue and considering it as an agent of ontological change in artworks' nature. In so doing, the chapter proposes to reconceptualise the musealised artwork as a set of documents that represent it. Following this standpoint and building on the model of documentation proposed in Chapter 1 (see: p. 74), it addresses the accuracy of representation and suggests accumulation as a possible way to secure its quality. By examining an artwork that has no stable physical representation, and that when not on view exists only as a set of digital files, this chapter focuses on the characteristics of new technologies for managing documents in the museum setting, as well as their consequences. The research into these theoretical concepts brings into focus complex interpersonal relationships that govern institutional contemporary-art collecting, especially those that transgress the polarity between artists and museums. It scrutinises their impact on the implementation of novel methods for the institutional care of contemporary artworks, and advances a model that may allow the identified problems to be overcome. The study culminates in a critical analysis of the artist interview and a preliminary reflection on its potential functions within the proposed model.

In his philosophical history of museums, literary scholar Didier Maleuvre (1999) surveys the criticisms levelled against museums and their decontextualising function, starting with the very first such institution – the Louvre. His list begins with the writings of art theorist Quatremère de Quincy, who already in 1806 publicly criticised how the Louvre was being instrumentalised in order to pluck artworks out of their original context, instead of serving as an instrument for the preservation of art. The critique presented by Quatremère was followed later on by many 20th-century thinkers – from Nietzsche to Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Dewey or Adorno (Maleuvre, 1999). The latter expressed his disagreement in the opening of his well-known essay *Valéry Proust Museum*, which with time became a symbol of museum criticism:

The German word, 'museal' ['museum-like'], has unpleasant overtones. It describes objects to which the observer no longer has a vital relationship and which are in the process of dying. They owe their preservation more to historical respect than to the needs of the present. Museum and mausoleum are connected by more than phonetic association. Museums are like the family sepulchres of works of art. They testify to the neutralization of culture. (Adorno, 1967, p. 175)

The idea that art separated from its original environment is like a dead body also shows up in postmodern debates about the museum model. Supporting artistic practices that reflect upon and question the museum as the means to secure art's critical hold over its institutions, art critic Douglas Crimp has stated that "it is upon this wresting of art from its necessity in reality that idealist aesthetics and the ideal museum are founded, and it is against the power of their legacy that we must still struggle for a materialist aesthetics and a materialist art" (Crimp, 1987, p. 265). To summarise, although the rift between the artwork and the context of its creation has faced criticism since the very founding of the museum as such, in spite of alternative propositions and approaches de-contextualisation has always been at the very centre of the museum model.[262]

But what if instead of criticising this condition, it were viewed as an asset? The isolation of the artwork from its context as a given condition is embraced by the concept of 'musealisation'. The term is a neologism gradually accepted and used since 1970 among members of the ICOM International Committee for Museology (ICOFOM) introduced by the 'father of scientific museology', Czech scholar Zbynek Stránský. Musealisation is defined in ICOM's glossary as an "operation of trying to extract, physically or conceptually, something from its natural or cultural environment and giving it a museal status, transforming it into a musealium or 'museum object', that is to say, bringing it into the museal field" (Desvallées & Mairesse, 2010). The same text describes musealisation as a scientific process, which includes the essential museum activities: preservation, research and communication. According to museologist Bruno

262 I am referring here for instance to the concepts of 'ecomuseum' and 'community museum' that emerged as a consequence of so-called 'new museology' – critical discourses around the traditional concept of museum as a cultural authority, and its social and political roles. New museology positions museums as political agents, contrasting with a traditional collection-centred vision of museums as repositories for objects (Desvallées & Mairesse, 2010).

Brulon Soares, with the terms musealium, museality and musealisation Stránský shifted the focus of museology from the museum as an instrument for a specific end, to the processes of attributing value to things (Soares, 2016). In more general terms, musealisation has been defined by Stránský as an expression of the universal human tendency to preserve, against all natural change and degradation, the elements of objective reality which represent cultural values (Soares, 2016). What distinguishes musealisation from other forms of preservation is precisely this decisive moment of transition from reality to the level of the cultural, museological realm, or 'the acquisition of the museum quality' (Soares, 2016). Accordingly, musealisation acknowledges and accepts de-contextualisation and points towards the inevitable change in artefacts' nature that accompanies their transformation into 'musealia'. This was aptly captured by another museologist, Kenneth Hudson, in the famous dictum: "a tiger in a museum is a tiger in a museum and not a tiger" (Hudson, 1977).

In the context of the argument presented in this dissertation, the change embedded in the concept of musealisation may be seen as akin to the ontological shift from 'a thing' to its 'representation', which forms the foundation of Briet's theoretical approach to documents as presented in the Chapter 1 (see: p. 73). Briet's expanded notion of document embraces any indexical sign that is preserved or recorded in order to represent, reconstitute or prove a phenomenon (Briet, 2006). Thus, the change in a contemporary artwork's nature upon entering the museum might be seen as its transformation into a set of documents that represent the artwork, namely what in Chapter 1 was referred to as the 'artwork-related documentation' (p. 70). This shift is evident for conceptual art or performance art, i.e. art that has no fixed, material embodiment. The assumption that the art-object in contemporary art is also a document makes it possible to extend this approach to other 'types' of contemporary art.

If we are to acknowledge that upon entering the museum artworks inevitably transform into a self-representation through documents, we must ask ourselves about the quality of this representation: is it accurate and faithful? There is a stimulating idea linked to these concepts, introduced by art historian and curator Richard Rinehart (Rinehart & Ippolito, 2014), that makes it possible not only to address this question but, additionally, to expand the theoretical model of artwork-related documentation as established in Chapter 1. For the sake of theorising institutional approaches to preservation of

media art, Rinehart drew a parallel between the so-called process of 'quantization', as used in digital signal processing, and documentation, viewed both as a concept and a practice. In Rinehart's comparison 'quantization' is a computer method for creating a digital representation of an analogue source. It entails sampling the initial source and assembling these samples in order to represent the source. Rinehart uses as an example the effort to portray continual gradations of the evening sky in digital imaging, where tiny snippets of the sky are ordered in such a manner that the human eye recognises them as a continuous gradient. Since each sample can have only one value, in the case of the sky each sample (pixel) would be equal to one shade of blue. No matter how small the samples are there will always be something lost in the transition. To mitigate this loss the sampling should be performed at least at twice the rate of the intended output. How does this apply to documentation? Rinehart argues that nowadays the stories that document artworks are not stored as linear narratives but instead as records in databases. These isolated records correspond to the samples in the example of the digital representation of the evening sky – they do not represent the whole of the artwork, as there is always something lost in the process of musealisation. For Rinehart this constitutes an argument in favour of accumulating as many stories as possible since, by overlapping or/and competing, they help mitigate the loss of certain shades and nuances (Rinehart & Ippolito, 2014).

In the day-to-day museum reality, artwork-related documentation functions as a set of records in one or more databases. Thus, an action is required in order to make particular documents interact with each other – an indispensable condition for Briet's vision of dynamic documentation and the continuous production of knowledge that keeps an artwork alive. Databases simplify work processes and help to administer large qualities of information. However, as art and media historian Harald Kraemer aptly noted when referring to computerised forms of working with data, if they are simply accumulated they provide no information about the relevance or quality of the information: "Digital data makes no distinction between Duchamp, Duchamp's urinoir, the photographer of Duchamp's urinoir, Duchamp's own words about his urinoir, and the art historian gibberish about Duchamp's urinoir" (Kraemer, 2007). Computers, at least at present, are not able to substitute human analysis and interpretation, especially when it comes to art, which is created by and for humans. Therefore researchers – be they scholars, curators, conservators, registrars, artists or users – must use documentation in an active way

Figure 48. Barbara Kruger, *Untitled* (*Past, Present, Future*). Installation view of the exhibition *The Temporary Stedelijk: Taking Place* at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. Photographer: Gert Jan van Rooij. Courtesy of Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.

(Kraemer, 2007). Thus, to complete the model of artwork-related documentation, it is necessary to rely on the time and effort of a human being. Accordingly, what animates the interaction of basic units of the documentation and minimises the losses caused by musealisation is ongoing research, which this book promotes as a key tool for the conservation of contemporary art.

Following the focal points identified in Chapter 2, this chapter further investigates how the artwork-related documents are produced and distributed in the framework of an art museum, and how this production and distribution is conditioned by the internal dynamics and structures of an institution. At its core stand all the concepts presented above – the transformation of the artwork during its musealisation, the accumulation of stories in artwork-related documentation as a way to secure the quality of the artwork's representation, and the need to foster interaction between the documents by means of research. It scrutinises multifarious ways of carrying out musealisation and ponders over how these different approaches can affect the artwork's possible futures. Finally, the consolidated and expanded model of artwork-related documentation is compared with the concept of the artist interview. The latter is studied both as a practice and as a document that enters and modifies the body of documentation by interacting with its other elements.

The study presented in this chapter is practice-based and follows the process of gathering, analysing and evaluating documentation of an artwork from a museum collection as part of the artist interview understood as a methodological approach (see: Chapter 1, p. 61). It was carried out during a five-month research fellowship at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (hereinafter referred to as SMA), which granted me the status of collection researcher, with all the privileges of a museum employee, including unrestricted access to the museum's resources. From the outset, I was assigned a specific task related to the 2010 spatial installation *Untitled* (*Past, Present, Future*) by Barbara Kruger, acquired by SMA in 2012. The challenges that this non-object-based piece's institutional keepers encountered when faced with the work's continuation were related mainly to its transient nature. My mission was to gather and analyse existing documentation on the installation in order to interview the artist about the future of the piece, and finally to recommend the institution long-term preservation measures.[263]

4.2 The Stedelijk Wall-Wrap

4.2.1 The Institutional History

The Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (SMA), the setting of my fieldwork and the host of the artwork studied, is the largest museum in the Netherlands dedicated to modern and contemporary art and design.[264] The story of Untitled (Past, Present, Future) by Barbara Kruger started during the directorship of renowned American curator Ann Goldstein, the first woman and non-Dutch person to hold this position. In 2010, the SMA, located on Amsterdam's Museumplein, had been closed to

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263   As the conservation problems of *Untitled* (*Past, Present, Future*) fall outside the scope of this dissertation, a detailed report on the proposed conservation strategy for the piece has been excluded from the main body of text. It was submitted to the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam and stored in the 'Objectdossier' on Kruger's work in '360°', a document management system used by the museum. See: Wielocha, A. (August 2017). *Report on the State of Documentation and Recommendations Regarding Preservation Strategy for B. Kruger's Untitled (Past, Present, Future)*, '360°' SMA virtual archive, Amsterdam.

264   A partial description of the fieldwork conducted for this case study was published in Wielocha, A. (2018). The Artist Interview as a Platform for Negotiating an Artwork's Possible Futures. *Art and Documentation,* (17), 31–45.

Figure 49. Barbara Kruger, *Untitled* (*Past, Present, Future*). Installation view of the exhibition *Works in Place* at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. Photographer: Gert Jan van Rooij. Courtesy of Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.

museumgoers for six years due to delays in the construction works on its new building. There was extreme pressure, both from the public as well as financing bodies, for the museum management to take action in order to improve the image and visibility of the institution, and solving this problem became one of the main tasks of the newly appointed director.[265] Although the new building was still not finished, the renovation of the old one had already come to an end. Goldstein chose to explore this opportunity and use the latter as a provisional venue. *The Temporary Stedelijk: Taking Place* was planned as a show that would welcome visitors back 'home' to the SMA.266 Since the exhibition was designed to take advantage of the temporary nature of the situation, artists were invited to make site-specific works for the gallery spaces, and this 'site-specificity' became a trademark of the project. Most of the works presented had

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[265] See: *Ann Goldstein New Director Stedelijk Museum* – Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (2009). Retrieved from http://www.stedelijk.nl/en/news-items/ann-goldstein-new-director-stedelijk-museum.

[266] Exhibition *Taking Place*, 28 August 2010 - 9 January 2011, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. See: Taking Place – Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (2011). Retrieved from: http://www. stedelijk.nl/en/exhibitions/taking-place

a conceptual character, which, aside from the fact that conceptual art was one of the new director's main areas of expertise, also had a more practical motivation. As the museum's infrastructure was still unfinished and the galleries did not meet exhibition standards, the presentation of vulnerable objects would not have been possible due to conservation requirements.[267]

One of the artists invited to the show was Barbara Kruger, who has a long shared professional history with Goldstein.[268] The space designated for Kruger was the Erezaal (Hall of Honour), the main gallery of the SMA's old building, for which Kruger designed the temporary immersive installation *Untitled* (*Past, Present, Future*), an example of her 'wall-wraps'. This term is borrowed from advertising, where it describes large-scale prints covering walls and/or floors in public spaces like airports or shopping centres. All walls and the floor of the Erezaal were covered by words in Kruger's characteristic Helvetica typeface printed in capital letters whose size was adapted to the specificity of the space by entirely filling the area, and the only colours used were black and white (Figure 48). Because of the messages' immense size, in order to read the content of the work it was necessary to wander across it. The text is an arrangement of sentences written in English and Dutch, most of them authored by the artist, while some are quotes from other writers, such as Orwell and Barthes. As curator Yilmaz Dziewior once remarked, Kruger's text combinations "in fact frequently make too much sense, that is, they enable multiple levels of interpretation and association, generating forms hindering the easy consumption that is existent in advertising" (Dziewior, 2014, p. 74). The basic, personal interpretation of the piece

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267   "We have to go back to when Ann Goldstein arrived, the building, this building was closed for many, many years. At the moment she came, there was another delay in delivering the new building. And then she said, 'Why should we wait for the new building, if the old building is already renovated? So let's start working there, let's open the [old] building, which was called Temporary Stedelijk'. And there was a project she did, where she looked [...] into the works we had in the collection that don't need [...] full climate system – so all the conceptual artworks, as her background was also very much in conceptual art". (B. Rutten, in-person interview, September 26, 2016)

268   Ann Goldstein curated a major retrospective of Kruger's work at the MOCA, Los Angeles (*Barbara Kruger*, 17 October 1999 – 13 February 2000) and wrote a series of articles about the artist, e.g.: Goldstein, A., et al (1999). *Barbara Kruger: Thinking of You*. Cambridge, Mass. and London, UK: The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles and MIT Press; Goldstein, A. (2008). Best of 2008: Women in the City. *ARTFORUM*, (3), pp. 284-285.

can be made as an emotional and/or intellectual reading of separate messages as well as the discovery of relations between them. The key features are the directness in addressing the viewer, and the sheer scale of the text. However, a broader study of both the artist's practice and the context of the wall-wraps' creation allows for a different, more complex reading of the artwork that will be presented later on. From a technical point of view, the installation consists of a digital print on vinyl film stuck directly to the walls and floor of the gallery space. The basis for the print is a design created by the artist which was then produced as a set of digital vector files by the studio that has worked with Kruger on her spatial installations for many years. Due to their physical characteristics wall-wraps are transient by nature – after each show the printed vinyl is removed from the architectural surfaces and destroyed.

In 2012, two years after the first presentation of *Untitled (Past, Present, Future),* the construction works at the museum were nearly complete, and the preparations for the grand opening of the new building started to gain speed. The first event planned for the 1,100-square-meter gallery in the basement of the new wing was an exhibition titled *Works in place*, which addressed the way contemporary artists make use of architectural space in their work.[269] It was announced as a presentation of the collection and Kruger's piece was to be installed again. As Goldstein wanted to show the artwork as a recent acquisition, at that point the need to regulate its status became urgent.[270] The musealisation of the artwork, which in this case consisted of its transformation from a temporary installation using the museum as a space, to part of the museum collection, started with the purchase, which was finalised in mid-August 2012 ahead of the show's opening at the end of September. The new manifestation of the artwork was radically different from the previous one (Figure 49). This time it was arranged in the lower-level gallery around a pavilion built exclusively for the purpose of the show, and the words occupied the floor and the external walls of the space. While

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269   Exhibition *Works in Place*, 23 September - 4 November 2012, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. See: Exhibition - Works in Place - Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. (2012). Retrieved from http://www.stedelijk.nl/en/exhibitions/exhibition-works-in-place.

270   In the letter to employees involved in the preparation of the exhibition Goldstein stated: "It is critical that the work is purchased and acquired by the time of our reopening so that it is presented as one of the collection works" (Goldstein, A. (2012, August 5). [Email to SMA employees]. SMA Archive, Amsterdam).

there were several new phrases added, the major difference was the addition of a third colour – green. During the acquisition an oral agreement was made between the artist and Goldstein that Kruger would provide three alternative installation options. This was also to include the adaptation of the original version designed for the Erezaal in 2010, incorporating the two additional doorways added after the renovation of the old building.[271] Ann Goldstein resigned as director in December 2013, as of which time none of the aforementioned adaptations had been delivered.

In 2016 the museum staff started to work on the redesign of the permanent exhibition and the reinstallation of *Untitled* (*Past, Present, Future*) was again taken into consideration. The new location, a space on the mezzanine containing the entrance to the auditorium, was proposed by curators and accepted by the artist, whereupon the museum got a second chance to resolve tasks related to the lacking installation options. In preparation for the installation of this third and supposedly final manifestation, the museum requested that the artist produce the modified drawings agreed upon under Goldstein, as well as installation instructions and a certificate of authenticity. As details of the agreement between the artist and the former director were never recorded on paper, it was ultimately decided that the best way to collect the missing information about the uncertain future of the piece once all agreed versions had been executed was to conduct an interview with the artist. As these circumstances coincided with the beginning of my fieldwork at the SMA, I was assigned the task of compiling the existing documentation on the artwork and preparing the interview.

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271   The details of the oral agreement were shared by the director with selected museum employees in the aforementioned email: "Barbara will provide alternative installation options, including an adaptation of the original version for the Erezaal (which now will incorporate the two additional doorways) and for one other smaller space like one of the large interior rooms we are using for Newman, etc. - we can confirm locations when she is here early next month. These additional plans this will come asap but not immediately. Barbara will invoice us this week. [... W]e should proceed to process immediately as it is critical that the work is purchased and acquired by the time of our reopening so that it is presented as one of the collection works" (Goldstein, A. (2012, August 25). [Email to SMA employees]. SMA Archive, Amsterdam).

4.2.2   Kruger's Artistic Practice and Wall-Wraps as Collectibles

Preparatory research is certainly one of the main challenges of interviewing, and at the same time a firm foundation that allows the interviewer to pose appropriate questions and interpret the participant's answers. In the museum framework this challenge is conditioned by the time and skills required to accomplish the task. Although the aforementioned *Guide to Good Practice* (2002) recommends close collaboration with a curator or art historian, in everyday museum practice this advice is usually difficult to follow due to the internal division of duties and notorious work overload. The responsibilities of curators in modern and contemporary art museums have shifted in recent decades from collection-focused to exhibition-focused, and so the process of artwork documentation has been passed on almost completely to registrars and conservators.[272] At the SMA this gap was filled by a team of researchers – art historians who are regularly involved in conservation-related investigation. However, during recent rearrangements of the museum's structure this unit has been reassigned from the section responsible for the collection to the one in charge of curatorial concerns. As a result, priorities have changed, and most of the researchers' work has shifted its focus to exhibition making. Nevertheless, having the time, means and willingness to fully analyse the implications of the interview process, I decided to face the challenge of preparing the artist interview alone.

The first step of the investigation was to learn about the place of *Untitled* (*Past, Present, Future*) within the context of Kruger's artistic practice. For this purpose, as well as to analyse the development of immersive installations as a medium, I created a complete list of Kruger's wall-wraps based on a survey of the literature. The beginning of immersive,

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272   This shift is broadly acknowledged among museum professionals and a set of relevant references can be found in: Bruce Altshuler, "Collecting the New: A Historical Introduction," in Collecting the New: Museums and Contemporary Art, edited by Bruce Altshuler (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1999), 1–9. In his more up-to-date book *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, art historian Terry Smith (2012) explains this shift with the example of the Chinese neologism for the word 'curator' – 策展人 [cè zhan rén] – which is made up of characters representing a person (rén) who manages (cè) the presentation of exhibitions (zhan). As the word entered Chinese in the 1990s after the role of the curator had changed, it retains no trace of the Latin word *curare*, meaning 'to care for', and with it any connection to the original job of curators: that of custodianship (Smith, 2012).

site-specific installations in the artist's oeuvre dates back to the late 1980s.[273] Over the following three decades Kruger created more than 40 installations in various types of interiors, covering their walls, floors, and occasionally ceilings with words.[274] In the first decade, the text was almost always complemented by black and white images, and in many cases it contained direct quotes from Kruger's older, formally more traditional pieces, amplified and often cropped differently. This (self)-appropriation extends to fragments of texts, both the artist's own writings as well as numerous quotes from other authors.[275] During this period the predominant colours are black, white and red, which are characteristic of Kruger's oeuvre in general. Although Kruger associates her first experiments of filling spaces with words and imagery with her interest in architecture, in various interviews the artist has stressed the fact that in contrast to architects, she never works with drawings or models.[276] Her method is much more intuitive: "I walk into a space and pretty much know how I'm going to engage it" (Colomina & Wigley, 2014, p. 125), or similarly: "I can walk into a space and pretty much know immediately [...] how I think things will play out" (Blazwick & Kruger, 2014).

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273   Curator Yilmaz Dziewior (2014, p. 79) associates the beginnings of Kruger's room installations with the exhibitions hosted by Fred Hoffman Gallery in Los Angeles (1989) and Rhona Hoffman Gallery in Chicago (1990).

274   For the purpose of this research, all wall-wraps designed and exhibited by Kruger have been gathered in the form of a provisional catalogue, which has been deposited in '360°', a document management system used by the SMA. See: Wielocha, A. (August 2017). *Report on the State of Documentation and Recommendations Regarding Preservation Strategy for B. Kruger's Untitled* (*Past, Present, Future*), '360°' SMA virtual archive, Amsterdam.

275   The list of authors quoted in different works by Kruger includes, among others: Virginia Woolf, Mark Twain, Robert Frost, Victor Hugo, H.G. Wells, Rebecca West, Henry Miller, Dorothy Parker, Wole Soyinka, Mary McCarthy, H.L. Mencken, Karl Kraus, Thomas Mann, Edgar Allen Poe, George Orwell, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Aimé Césaire, Thomas Paine, Thomas Wolfe, Charlotte Brontë, Franz Kafka, Molière, Roland Barthes, Frantz Fanon, Walter Benjamin, John Maynard Keynes, Jean Paul Sartre, George Santayana, Jacob Bronowski, Abraham Lincoln, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Malcolm X, Frederick Douglas, Indira Gandhi, Sojourner Truth, Susan B. Anthony, Harriet Tubman, Martin Luther King, Jr., Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Benjamin Disraeli, and Harriet Beecher Stowe. See: Craver, 2013, p. 27.

276   "And I [...] don't build models, I don't have acolytes and assistance, [...] not that it is wrong but it is not my methodology, it is not my way of working." (Blazwick & Kruger, 2014); "I plan my installations I don't do models. [...] It was only after I sent all my final image files to the Hirshhorn Museum that they made a model and put my work on it." (Colomina & Wigley, 2014)

One of the aims of compiling a list of Kruger's wall-wraps was to understand whether the artist considered these installations from the outset as autonomous artworks. In Kruger's case, an example of such works would be formally more traditional pieces, for instance prints designed to be hung on a wall, framed in characteristic red frames.[277] This issue was addressed by tracing the development of the room-wraps' titles through the history of their presentations, and the study was built upon the assumption that an autonomous artwork would be assigned a title of its own. This ultimately turned out to be a rather challenging task, as not all artworks are always listed in a show's description. Nevertheless, based on this investigation it was possible to conclude that, at least in the beginning, room installations were not titled, but rather were referred to under the general name of an exhibition. This is the case of the iconic work presented at Mary Boone Gallery in New York in 1991, which, judging by reviews from the show, at the beginning had no designated title.[278] A title was assigned to a wall-wrap for the first time in 1994, and this fact is directly related to the musealisation of one of the installations by the Museum Ludwig in Cologne.[279] Outside of the collection context, a title appears in relation to the installation Untitled (Between being born and dying) commissioned by Stockholm's Moderna Museet in 2008.[280] Interestingly, the room-wrap shown the following year in the Lever House Art Collection in New York was given the same name as the one presented in Stockholm; however, this time

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277   I would distinguish between autonomous artworks and, for example, projects carried out in public spaces such as billboard campaigns. Ultimately, what characterises this distinction is artworks' collectability – their capacity to be collected in a traditionally understood way, namely as an object.

278   Exhibition *Barbara Kruger*, Mary Boone Gallery, New York, 1991. For a detailed description of the exhibition see: Smith, R. (1991, January 11). Review/Art; Barbara Kruger's Large-Scale Self-Expression. The New York Times. New York. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/1991/01/11/arts/review-art-barbara-kruger-s-large-scale-self-expression.html?mcubz=1.

279   It is important to mention here that the issue of titles in Kruger's artistic practice is rather unusual as most of the artworks, not only wall-wraps but also those called by the artist during the interview 'plain pieces' are called Untitled with a subtitle between the brackets, like in the case of the Stedelijk *Untitled* (*Past, Present, Future*). The case of the piece *Untitled* (*Ohne Titel*) 1994/1995 from the Ludwig Museum in Cologne will be explained in details in the following part of this chapter.

280   See: *The Second Museum of Our Wishes: Barbara Kruger*. (2010). Retrieved from https://www.modernamuseet.se/stockholm/en/2010/11/09/barbara-kruger/.

the word 'Untitled' had been removed.[281] Since that time the wall-wraps have been given independent titles that differ from the names of the exhibitions in which they appear.[282]

The study of the titles, together with other features of Kruger's oeuvre, provided grounds for the assumption that wall-wraps, even those commissioned and/or acquired by art institutions, were at first designed as temporary interventions. To better understand their character, it is necessary to adopt a broader perspective and look at room installations as a practice which emerged in parallel to Kruger's politically and socially engaged projects in public spaces. In the context of the artist's common employment of mediums such as billboards, advertisement-like wall compositions, stickers on urban buses or posters in bus shelters, the wall-wraps are just another way of intervening. The project *Empatía*, in which Kruger covered the walls and ceilings of a Mexico City underground station with words and phrases, confirms this assumption.[283] Besides the latter case, Kruger intervenes with wall-wraps mostly in art-related spaces and contexts – galleries, museums, exhibition venues, etc.

281   The description on the Lever House Art Collection's website states: "Works in the exhibition: Barbara Kruger, BETWEEN BEING BORN AND DYING, 2009. Acrylic ink on adhesive vinyl, dimensions variable". See: Lever House Art Collection | Barbara Kruger. (2009). Retrieved from https://www.leverhouseartcollection.com/commissions/barbara-kruger

282   Two installations: *Untitled* (*Suggestions*), 2013 and *Untitled* (*Reminder*), 2013 was shown in Kunsthaus Bregenz during the exhibition *Belief + Doubt*. For 2016 in the exhibition *Mashup: The Birth of Modern Culture* in Vancouver Art Gallery Kruger designed piece *Untitled* (*SmashUp*), 2016, etc.

283   Exhibition *Empatía*, Mexico City, 2016. Barrera, A. (2016, November 23). Barbara Kruger deja su Empatía en el Metro. El Universal. Retrieved from http://www.eluniversal.com. mx/articulo/cultura/artes-visuales/2016/11/23/barbara-kruger-deja-su-empatia-en-el-metro#imagen-1

4.2.3   Unpacking the Nature of the Artwork

> I attempt to investigate the complex interrelationships between power and society,
> but as for the visual presentation itself, I try to avoid a high degree of difficulty.
> I would like for people to be drawn directly into the work. (Barbara Kruger quoted
> in Wagner, 2006, p. 13)

The study of Kruger's oeuvre allowed for a basic understanding of the concept and methodology behind her room installations. Yet, one of the issues left to be addressed were their context-dependent idiosyncrasies (in this case site-specificity and their relationship to a particular historical moment) and media-variability – key features of contemporary art which are crucial when considering an artwork's possible futures. The existence of bonds between *Untitled* (*Past, Present, Future*) and the local socio-political context was insinuated by museum employees who witnessed the commission and production of the artwork. During a personal interview, Bart Rutten, the SMA's Head of Collections, described this relationship as follows:

> [... T]he work deals with the combination of quotes from Dutch newspapers,
> plus if I'm not mistaken, Shakespeare's Hamlet, something like that, it was
> Hamlet or Richard III, I do not know, but Shakespeare. [...] So the semantics
> are retrieved from Dutch newspapers. [...] So in 2012 a lot of right-wing
> politics were taking place in the Netherlands, and you could also see the
> translation of that in the kind of quotes you could find in the newspapers.
> (B. Rutten, in-person interview, September 26, 2016)

A similar conviction was expressed by curator Margriet Schavemaker, who was Head of Collections during Goldstein's directorship: "That was very much based on the headlines from that period [...]" (M. Schavemaker, in-person interview, May 16, 2017).[284]

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284   This, however, is a misinterpretation, probably caused by the use of images from local newspapers in another two wall-wraps, one of which directly preceded the SMA's commission. The first one was made in 2005 at the Gallery of Modern Art in Glasgow and the second one in 2012 at Martin Gropius Bau in Berlin.

My analysis of the sentences employed in the piece relied on the advice of the artist herself, who has often emphasised that "no one needs a PhD in conceptual art to understand my work" (Kruger & Dahan, 2014, para. 4). After translating the parts of *Untitled* (*Past, Present, Future*) written in Dutch I found not local headlines but a series of familiar sentences that Kruger has repeated continuously in other works – room installations, videos, as well as formally more traditional 'hanging' pieces. Characteristic and powerful quotes from Barthes and Orwell (e.g. "All violence is the illustration of a pathetic stereotype") are combined with short phrases directed to an undefined 'you' (e.g. "please laugh"). The only element that recalls the geographic location of the installation is the use of Dutch. Accordingly, whereas the artwork as such is not site-specific, its iterations are site-responsive in terms of the actual relationship between the dimensions of the artwork and the particular architectural space.[285] Nevertheless, the artwork is not bound to the Stedelijk Museum, to Amsterdam as a geographical location, or to idiosyncrasies of Dutch culture, and as such it seems that it can be adapted to any other architectural space which meets the right conditions in terms of dimensions, even outside the SMA's walls. As I will demonstrate later on with examples, even the use of the local language, or rather the translation of phrases from previous wall-wraps, might not be a fixed sanction, but a conditional adaptation ().

The next issue to analyse was the media-specificity, understood as the rigid bond between the materials employed and the reading of the work. In 2010, when the artist was invited by the SMA for the first collaboration, Kruger had already been working comfortably with digital printing for almost a decade. She typically executes her wall-wraps in commercial printing labs that work with different types of printing techniques on vinyl film. It is important to mention that this was not the case in the very earliest of Kruger's immersive room installations. Her first wall-wraps were screen-printed on

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285 When using the term 'site-specific' I have in mind a combination of two notions defined by Miwon Kwon – 'phenomenological site specificity', which binds an artwork to the experience of the physical characteristics of a particular place, and 'discursive site specificity' where the anchor lies in the socio-political issues and circumstances (Kwon, 2002). The term 'site-responsive' could be replaced by 'site-dependent' or 'site-related' as employed by Stigter in her analysis of the conceptual artwork by Jan Dibbets *All shadows that struck me in the Kröller-Müller Museum* (Stigter, 2016, p. 195).

paper and/or vinyl and then stuck to the walls in pieces.[286] In subsequent sections we will examine a case of an installation originally printed in this traditional technique and later reprinted digitally (see. p. 183).

As no physical samples of the artwork's material presence were kept by the museum after any of the two past displays, the understanding of the significance of the materials employed required a trustworthy source of information. As previous instantiations of *Untitled (Past, Present, Future)* were all produced by the same printing lab, Omnimark, I opted to interview the company's project manager, Hwie-Bing Kwee, who coordinated the process in both instances. The 2010 and 2012 instantiations were produced in a similar manner. Digital files were sent to the museum by the studio that collaborates with Kruger in the preparation of her spatial installations. The museum passed the files on to Omnimark, which executed them as a UV-cured print on 3M PVC self-adhesive film, laminated with a matte coating.[287] According to Kwee's account, in 2010 Kruger assisted in the installation of the piece and took an active part in changing the original design to adapt it more precisely to circumstances encountered in-situ.[288] With the help of a technician from Omnimark, the artist altered drawings prepared by her studio to account for the empty spaces in the walls.

Wall and floor graphics in both instances were printed in panels whose size depended on the capacity of the printing machine and the available width of the PVC film rolls. In both cases, the rolls of film employed were of the same width; however, while in 2010 the wall graphics were divided into vertical panels, in 2012 they were printed on horizontal panels which were split into two parts, resulting in a horizontal joint at mid-height. As the panels were precision-cut on the digital cutting table, the joints were barely visible. However, there are many ways to make this division: it can be performed mechanically according to the width of the roll, or in a more careful, precise way by hiding the joints between the letters to make them even less perceptible. The choice of method, which affects the production budget, was consulted with the artist:

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286   Kruger describes in detail her struggles with the shift from analogue to digital in the interview conducted by Iwona Blazwick. See: Blazwick & Kruger, 2014.

287   Source: H. B. Kwee, in-person interview, February 17, 2017.

288   The drawings at first did not include the semi-circular planes at the junction of the wall and ceiling of the gallery.

> I was a little bit worried about the panelling. But she loved the panelling
> because she said, […] 'I want to be recognized like a graffiti artist, don't make
> it invisible, make it visible'. So with the floor, if you have the panels' seams
> – she loves the way you could recognize the panels, it is her way of being
> a graffiti artist. (H. B. Kwee, in-person interview, February 17, 2017)

4.2.4   Summary: Perpetuating interventions

After analysing the data gathered, I came to understand that the artwork's process of musealisation had been influenced by the special circumstances in which the piece was commissioned and later included in the collection, namely the transitional moment for the institution during the delayed construction of the new building. Furthermore, the affinity between the artist and the director played an important role; this relationship of trust allowed arrangements to be made quickly, as required by the fast pace of the art show's preparation and planning.

Nevertheless, the current condition of the artwork presents challenges for ensuring its continuity, at least in its initial form as an immersive room installation. Although after the execution of its third instantiation, *Untitled* (*Past, Present, Future*) could be, in theory, reinstalled following any of its past manifestations, in practice this would not be an easy task. The architecture of the first location has changed since then, and the artist would have to adapt the initial design to the new situation. The second manifestation was bound to the design of the temporary exhibition, and in order to repeat the architectural context the pavilion would have to be rebuilt. Moreover, to complicate matters, the lower gallery recently underwent a renovation.[289] These two examples and the history of the frequent architectural transformations of SMA's exhibition spaces triggered a reflection on architecture as a support or medium which

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289   The distribution of the space in the new permanent exhibition of works from the
SMA collection was designed by OMA, the architecture firm founded by Rem Koolhaas,
regarded as one of the most important architectural thinkers of his generation. For more about
OMA's involvement in the reinvention of the permanent exhibition see: STEDELIJK BASE -
The new collection presentation from 1880-now. (2017). Retrieved from https://www.stedelijk.
nl/en/exhibitions/stedelijk-base-the-new-collection-presentation. Although the solution offered
by OMA it is not a permanent one, it will most likely remain in the museum for some time.

can become obsolete, similarly to hardware in the case of technology-based art.[290] Certainly, both spaces can be reconstructed by creating life-size models, but as I will argue later, such an approach seems to go against the wall-wrap's nature.

The study of Kruger's artistic practice related to room-installations led to the conclusion that the wall-wraps were not intended to be permanent and are intrinsically ephemeral and temporary. The main goal of the wall-wraps as an artistic practice was to increase the impact of the messages used by the artist in her more traditional pieces meant to be hung on walls, which is why her installations combine elements from older works. The character of the piece evokes other forms of art occurring in public spaces, for instance graffiti art, and its transience and thus variability is directly related to the idea of the 'intervention' and the 'occupation of space'. Moreover, following this line of thought, a wall-wrap recreated in the same space over and over again would give up an important part of the 'freshness' inherent to the idea of artistic intervention and thus a part of its conceptual integrity. Additionally, to my current knowledge, none of the wall-wraps has been reinstalled so far without changing its location.[291] Based on a detailed analysis of issues related to both past executions of the piece at SMA, it is safe to conclude that the materials employed should not be considered as fixed and therefore, to a certain extent, are not significant for the reading of the artwork. Since the artist was continuously adapting her technique to the available technical possibilities, such an approach can likewise be employed in the future under certain conditions, such as keeping the colours and the finish of the surface as close as possible to the initial ones.[292]

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290 The SMA's architecture has undergone various significant changes during its more than 100 years of existence. The collection, first housed at the Rijksmuseum, was moved in 1895 into a building of its own. In 1954 a new extension was opened, the so-called 'Sandberg Wing', named after the museum director at the time, Willem Sandberg (Leigh, 2008). More than 50 years later, in the fall of 2012, SMA finished a complete renovation of the 19th-century building and opened a new extension, preceded by the demolition of the 'Sandberg Wing'. See: Stedelijk Museum opens September 23rd. (2012). Retrieved from http://www.stedelijk.nl/en/news-items/stedelijk-museum-opens-september-23rd.

291 As of July 2017.

292 A detailed description of the artwork's medium, material specifications and possible preservation measures has been provided in the report prepared by the author of this text for the SMA. See: Wielocha, A. (August 2017). *Report on the State of Documentation and Recommendations Regarding Preservation Strategy for B. Kruger's Untitled* (*Past, Present, Future*), '360°' SMA virtual archive, Amsterdam.

At present the continuity of *Untitled* (*Past, Present, Future*) depends on the collaboration between the museum and the artist, and the planning of the third presentation of the piece afforded an opportunity to foster this inevitable dialogue. The historical information collected and the analysis of Kruger's artistic practice that led to the interpretation of the piece might already be seen as a firm foundation for the artist interview. However, as the interview is not an end of this investigation but rather a means to develop the overall argument, I will first reflect on how the information gathered and evaluated during the preliminary research is structured and distributed within the museum. This proposed detour will allow us not only to map the topography of the artwork-related documentation, but also to ponder over its structure.

4.3   Institutional Gaze: The wall-wrap as a musealium

Unlike artworks that are represented by a fixed, physical object, *Untitled* (*Past, Present, Future*) is not kept in the museum storage, but instead dispersed among various, mostly virtual locations. While the previous subchapter looked at Kruger's piece as an artwork, the following considers it a musealium and analyses the transformation that the artwork underwent upon entering the museum collection. Following the selection of focal points of the investigation as set in Chapter 2 (see: p. 155), it addresses the structure of the artwork-related documentation together with museum organisation and practices related to collection care. For the latter, I will specifically look at how they mimic traditional classification principles and if and how that might influence the continuation of a contemporary artwork, in this case a concept-based piece without a fixed material representation.

4.3.1   The Artwork as Multifarious Virtual Entities

In everyday museum life, all artworks from the collection exist as records in a cataloguing database known as the Collection Management System (CMS), which is the main source of information about the collection for internal purposes.[293] In each institution

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293   The SMA uses Adlib Museum, the most popular software among collecting institutions in the
        Netherlands. For more on collection management systems see: Chapter 1, p. 67.

the structure of the database is divided into different categories, which might be departments, sections or specific collections and sub-collections. In the SMA's system *Untitled (Past, Present, Future)* is assigned to an administrative section called 'Painting and Sculpture', and the artwork is a part of a collection called 'Installations with Various Non-Cinematographic Materials'.[294] Usually this categorisation, determined when the artwork enters the museum, assigns responsibility over a musealium to a given administrative unit. In the case of the SMA, the categories of the database do not match up with the museum's structure. The CMS was implemented in the 1990s and certain categories follow old organisational charts which have changed several times since then.[295] The information about Kruger's work in the CMS turned out to be limited, as besides the name of the artist, title and two dates (2010 and 2012), in the column 'notes' it stated that the record was 'in bewerking' (in progress). Most of the bookmarks, including the one related to the physical characteristics, had not been filled in.[296]

The next step in gathering information about an artwork from the SMA collection is to consult '360°', an electronic document management system implemented in 2012 that acts as the 'operational heart' of the museum.[297] The application of this kind of tool is quite unique within the museum field, at least in the context of institutions visited as part of this investigation. This system allows all employees to access digital documents

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294   In Dutch: Afdeling Schilderijen en Beeldhouwkunst and Installaties mbv Diverse Niet-Cinematografische Materialen.

295   Gert Hoogeveen, Team Leader of Audio-Visual Art Handling at SMA, commented on the origin of this categorisation as follows: "It is a very old-fashioned thing, they decided on that I think late in the sixties, beginning of seventies and the structure [AW: of the CMS] has never been changed because it is very complicated to do that, it takes a lot of work" (G. Hoogeveen, in-person interview, May 17, 2017).

296   As of July 2017.

297   For the process of implementation of the system at the SMA see: Digitt. (2016). DocumentWereld: Platform voor EIM-professionals. Retrieved from http://www.documentwereld.nl/Achtergrondartikelen/113/11108-stedelijk_museum_amsterdam_digitaliseert

produced by the institution in an easy and organised way.[298] It functions as a virtual archive of all kinds of textual data produced by the museum, as well as information related to the artworks from the collection. Since its launch in 2012, '360°' slowly started replacing the traditional 'analogue' archive, and so most of the documentation of artworks purchased around this date is stored there. Each object from the collection has a separate folder in '360°' called 'Objectdossier', where all information related to an artwork produced across different activities can be easily stored. The museum's email application, as well as text editors such as Microsoft Word, is equipped with a special extension for storing emails and documents directly in the repository. The software allows users to save various types of documents except images, audio and video files, which due to size constraints are kept on separate servers. The 'Objectdossier' is linked to and therefore accessible from the CMS entry of each artwork.

The 'Objectdossier' on Kruger's work contains a vast quantity of emails, both internal as well as exchanged with and between different administrative entities and individuals involved in the production of the artwork's manifestations, the artist included. Other types of documents which can be found there are low-res annotated preparatory drawings in pdf format, quotes from printing labs, scans of press clippings, etc. In the absence of the archivist, it all seems to be quite messy and chaotic, but its concise file-naming system and powerful search engine make it easy to browse. This is the location where the aforementioned email from Ann Goldstein describing the agreement made with Kruger can be found. Undoubtedly, not all the correspondence on an artwork produced by the museum gets archived in '360°'. The selection depends on the particular decision of the employee and there are some, like registrars, who devote more time and attention to this matter than others.[299] Nevertheless, the unwritten rule is that all important information should be kept and, judging from the case of Kruger's piece, one can assume that it is generally followed. Interestingly, the documentation

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298   This view is based on the author's own experience with '360°', preceded by the short introductory workshop organised by the museum for all new employees. However, it is important to mention that opinions about the system vary across the institution, which has been reflected in the interviews conducted during this study. Some of the employees find it complicated and unintuitive, and are therefore reluctant to use it. An extended reflection on the possibilities of '360°' is provided in Chapter 5 (see: p. 296).

299   M. Schavemaker, in-person interview, May 16, 2017.

produced within the conservation department is exempt from this regulation, and as such is deposited only in the internal archive of the unit – an issue I will come back to shortly (see: p. 259).

Furthermore, *Untitled* (*Past, Present, Future*) is represented in the museum by digital files stored on two separate servers, supervised by different organisational units and accessible through different 'gatekeepers'. While the photographs from exhibitions featuring the piece are kept on a 'photographic' server managed by a designated employee, the digital drawings used for the production of both manifestations are stored on the server of the Audio-Visual Department (AVA).[300] In the museum these drawings are conceptualised as substitutes for an art object, and are meant to be cared for and conserved. During my research I analysed and assessed these files as a potential source for the execution of subsequent manifestations of the artwork. My familiarity with the history of the piece triggered certain questions about which version of the drawings was actually stored in the repository. As mentioned, on the occasion of the initial production of *Untitled* (*Past, Present, Future*) Kruger modified the original files during the install. Moreover, as described by the project manager involved in the production of Kruger's piece, the 'final' versions of drawings sent by the studio were in both instances adjusted to the actual dimensions of the architectural spaces.[301] The lack of descriptions makes it difficult to know if the files hosted on the AVA server are the drawings originally created by the artist's studio or those modified later on by the printing lab.

While all of these virtual entities represent the artwork while it is not on display, they are not considered by the institution to be the artwork as such. All of them reside within the museum walls and are not accessible to the public. In the open online SMA collection catalogue the piece is not listed at all.[302] However, the piece is

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300   Specifically, they are editable vector drawings created in Adobe Illustrator and saved as EPS (Encapsulated PostScript) files in the case of 2010 version, and Adobe Illustrator format (.ai extension) for the 2012 version. All files are stored on the so-called 'AVA' (Audio-Visual Department) server.

301   H.B. Kwee, in-person interview, February 17, 2017.
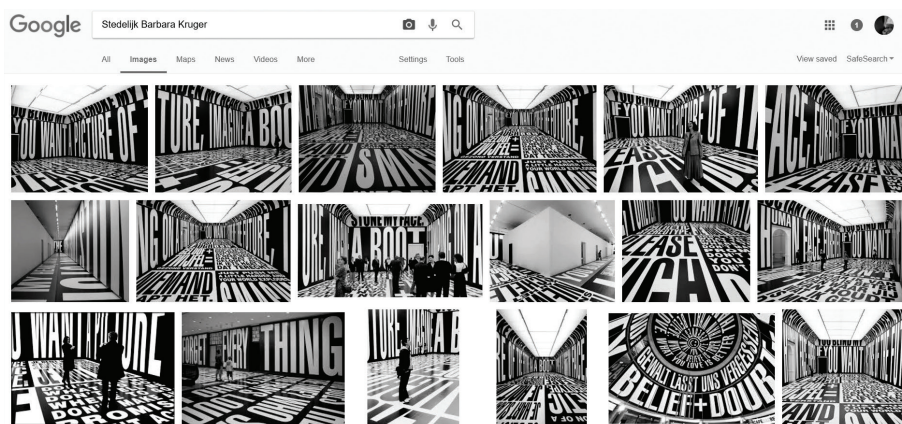
302   As of August 2018.

Figure 50. Results of the Google Image search for "Stedelijk Barbara Kruger".

partially accessible to the public, even when not installed, through imagery available on the Internet. A search in 'Google Images' based on the title of the work and the artist's name turns up plenty of images, for instance from art-related blogs and websites, Instagram, Flickr or Pinterest (Figure 50). Interestingly, museum employees' first choice when looking for photographs of a particular piece from the collection is also the Internet, as opposed to any of the aforementioned databases.[303] These images depict the installation from different angles and perspectives and show how people interact with the piece, whereas the photographs hosted on the 'photographic server' present Kruger's installation 'cleaned' both of imperfections and visitors.[304]

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303 This observation was made during the fieldwork conducted at the SMA.

304 The photographs kept on the 'photographic' server were taken to create an 'official image' of the artwork to be distributed in the media and catalogues, and do not show Kruger's piece as a 'physical object'. This difference, while not obvious to the broader public, is rather well known to museum professionals, especially conservators. There are many ways an artwork can be photographed depending on which of its qualities are of interest to the photographer. Pictures taken for cataloguing purposes usually do not depict technical details or imperfections important for understanding how the artwork was made. Images of both past manifestations of Kruger's piece which can be found on the server do not show, for instance, the joints between printed panels, which proved to be a significant feature for understating Kruger's artistic practice (Figure 4).

One could argue that all artworks from the institutional collection when not on view function in the museum environment as virtual entities. The difference lies in the possibility to refer to fixed material objects at any time. If there are no objects, these virtual entities form the basis for the artwork's reading, as well as for decisions related to the future appearance of the artwork's physical manifestation.

4.3.2   The Artwork as an Exhibit

On the occasion of each presentation, the status of *Untitled (Past, Present, Future)* within the institution shifts from the 'musealium' to be cared for and preserved to an 'event' which needs to be carefully organised, budgeted and produced. As a consequence, the vast majority of the correspondence with Kruger regarding the artwork was held by project managers responsible for the preparation of the exhibition, with almost no involvement of the staff responsible for collection care, conservators included.[305] The organisation of the third display followed the same logic.

The new location for the piece, a space on the mezzanine containing the entrance to the auditorium, was proposed by the museum and accepted by the artist. The photographic documentation of the space was prepared and sent to Kruger together with the architectural plans. Although only a few emails about the choice of the space have been stored on '360°', it seems that the SMA was constantly adapting the specification of the conditions for the new manifestation to the circumstances of the forthcoming show. Due to the concerns related to the durability of the materials, at the beginning the institution proposed to modify the initial design so as to not cover the floor.[306] On the basis of the first sketches delivered by the artist's studio, the museum team built a scale

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305   However, it is important to acknowledged that various SMA employees approached Kruger several times to remind her that the promised modified drawings for the Erezaal, and well as the certificate of authorship, had not yet been delivered. These emails, mostly the outgoing correspondence, are stored on '360°'.

306   In the email sent to the project manager, Kruger explained: "Again, these are only sketches. I did them when I had no idea that, unlike the earlier installations, the floor was to be excluded. I think the floor is an important part of the work." (Kruger, B. (2017, January 3). [Email to Lucas Bonekamp]. SMA Archive, Amsterdam). The initial decision to exclude the floor was caused by concerns related to the durability of the material employed, as the installation was to stay up for the next five years.
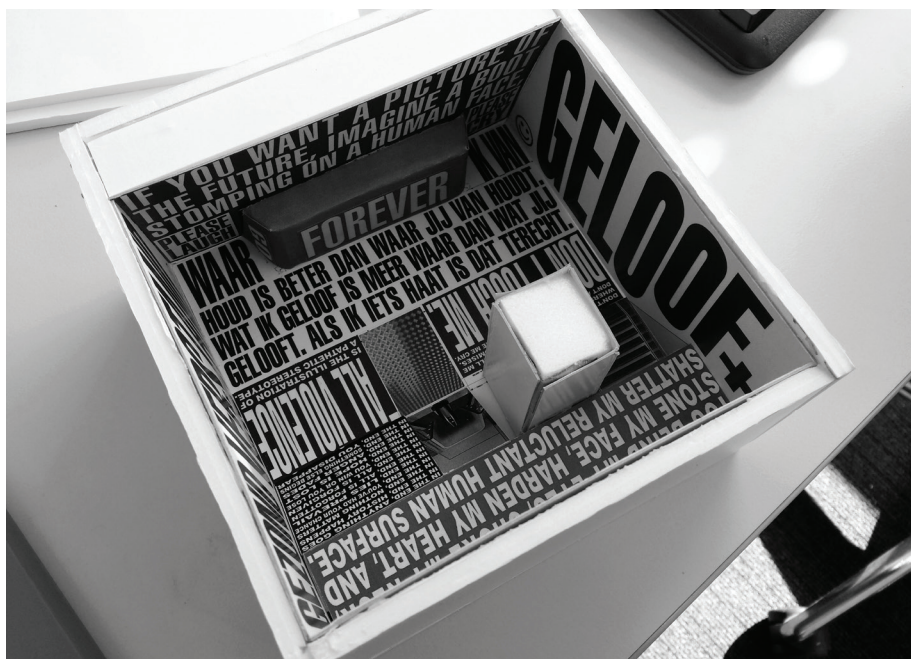
Figure 51. The scale model of the installation *Untitled* (*Past, Present, Future*) at the 2017 display of permanent collection of Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. Courtesy Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. Photographer: A. B. Wielocha.

model of the installation to get the curators' approval (Figure 51). The space selected for the third presentation differs from the previous two in important ways. Both the Erezaal and the gallery in the museum basement are cuboid, with mostly right angles. Meanwhile, the new space includes stairs, an escalator, a glass elevator shaft, and some organic-shaped elements, for instance a round-curved window and a kind of an 'avant-corps' containing entrances to the auditorium. Thus, the new manifestation of the piece needed to be significantly adapted to this distinct architectural setting. While in terms of colours it followed the same scheme as the previous manifestation, the set of phrases was significantly modified, with some sentences disappearing and others being added. What drew my attention was the fact that, although Kruger repeatedly emphasises the physical reception of the space as an important part of her working method, the third adaptation of *Untitled* (*Past, Present, Future*) was carried out based on photographs and architectural drawings alone.

The lack of documentation on the complex decision-making behind the production and install of the piece can be explained by the scant involvement of the employees responsible for collection care. Although the story can be partially recreated thanks to the correspondence stored on '360°', certain decisions, such as what guided the approval of the material samples, has been never recorded. Nevertheless, as the next paragraph argues, it is not clear who would actually be responsible for carrying out this documentation.

4.3.3   The Artwork as 'the Object of Conservation'

Because of the lack of fixed material representation and unclear affiliation in terms of formal categories, *Untitled* (*Past, Present, Future*) seen as a musealium and 'the object of conservation' eludes institutional procedures. The category 'Installations with Various Non-Cinematographic Materials' assigned upon its accession does not match any particular organisational museum unit or specialisation. While most of the SMA curators have no defined area of responsibility, conservators are grouped into teams according to traditional disciplines – paper and photography, painting, applied art and sculpture.[307] Since technically Kruger's piece is a print on a plastic support, the conservation department assigned it to the category 'Photography'.[308] Nevertheless, due to the processes and dynamics described in the previous subchapter, conservators were involved neither in the production of the piece nor in its acquisition, which is unusual within SMA procedures.[309] However, besides the conservation department, the separate Audio-Visual Department (AVA) is also involved in conservation-related issues. It deals with artworks that have to be plugged in or switched on to work correctly – from installations built with fluorescent lights through video and sound

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307   With the exception of newly appointed Curator of Time-Based Media, see: Press Release: Karen Archey joins Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam as Curator of Contemporary Art, Time-Based Media. (2017). Retrieved from https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/news/press-release-karen-archey-joins-stedelijk-museum-amsterdam-as-curator-of-contemporary-art-time-based-media

308   Weerdenburg, S. (2012, October 4). [Email to Saar Groeneveld]. 2012.1.0189 Objectdossier on '360°', SMA Archive, Amsterdam.

309   The exceptionality of this circumstance was frequently stressed by museum employees in many interviews and discussions. Similar artworks that also have to be produced entirely or partially for each exhibition received a great deal of attention in terms of documentation, e.g. *Aggregation: One Thousand Boats Show* (*1963*) by Yayoi Kusama, which consists of a sculpture and wall-paper which has to be printed for each display.

art to software-based art.[310] Generally, the main responsibility of the AVA department is broadly understood to be the care of time-based media artworks – pieces that have duration as a dimension, excluding performance art.[311] Nevertheless, whereas *Untitled* (*Past, Present, Future*) is collected by the museum in the form of digital files, it has no duration in time and therefore is not considered time-based art. Thus, in this case, the contribution of the AVA department was limited to the storage of the digital drawings in the museum digital repository, and did not include standard procedures for digital artworks such as analysis of the files, description or documentation. This is the reason for the lack of annotations on the collected files as previously described (p. 242).

4.3.4   Summary: Across the institutional divisions

Upon its musealisation, *Untitled* (*Past, Present, Future*) transformed into a set of documents distributed between various institutional repositories. The allocation of the documents as well as the assignment of responsibilities in terms of broadly defined care depended on how the information was categorised: the data describing the artwork entered the CMS and fell under the responsibility of registrars; information related to the circumstances of the artwork's execution was gathered on '360°'; images of the artwork were stored on the designated server, while the 'digital object' was sent to the repository of the AVA department. The investigation proved that this classification is random and often hinders a proper understanding of the artwork, as the information conveyed by different documents is complementary and often valid only when juxtaposed with other sources. The inclusion of the section that relates to the images encountered on the Internet aimed to demonstrate that not all of the

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310   The official name of the department is Audio-Visual Art Handling Department; however, on the museum website it is referred to as the 'Audiovisual Collection Care Department'. See: Audiovisual Collection Care: Behind the scenes. Retrieved from https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/dig-deeper/collection-care-conservation/collection-care/audiovisual-collection-care. The description of the department's duties has been made based on the interview with the Team Leader, see: G. Hoogeveen, in-person interview, May 17, 2017.

311   It is worth mentioning that as of June 2017, the SMA no longer has a time-based media collection as such. The Audio-Visual Department is in charge of two collections: Bewegend beeld en/of geluid (moving image with/without sound) and Installatie mbv Cinematografische Hulpmiddelen (Installation with Cinematographic Components). Software-based art falls under the latter. (G. Hoogeveen, in-person interview, May 17, 2017).

information significant for the understanding of the artwork is actually collected by the institution, and, because the Internet is an 'unstable archive', that information is left outside of the scope of the institutional care.

Using Domínguez Rubio's designation, *Untitled* (*Past, Present, Future*) is an 'unruly' artwork that cannot be easily stabilised and transformed into timeless 'objects' of formal delectation, and as such it had resisted the standard institutional classification processes (Domínguez Rubio, 2014).[312] Due to this fact and the unusual circumstances in which it was commissioned and acquired, it evaded museum procedures and workflows and fell into a kind of 'responsibility gap'. Which features of the institutional organisation of duties triggered this situation? The SMA example points to the deep divisions between institutional units, which originated in the traditional museum structure and classification processes, such as assigning artworks to particular categories. The decision on the acquisition of the piece was made within the curatorial department, but curators were barely involved in the process itself. Exhibiting as a museum priority raised the importance of project managers in charge of the success of the exhibitions in terms of organisation and logistics, but not involved in issues related to conservation.[313] Conservators responsible for securing the continuation of the artwork were left aside because the work has no fixed, physical representation. Lastly, the AVA department, which takes care of these musealia that exist only as digital files, was not fully involved because the piece was not classified as a 'time-based media' artwork.

How do these divisions influence the content of documentation? For instance, each administrative unit initiates and carries on communication with an artist on its own terms and pursuing its own goals. In the case of *Untitled* (*Past, Present, Future*), this

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312 In his often-quoted article, Domínguez Rubio introduces the concepts of 'docility' and 'unruliness' to define how artworks behave within the museum collection. See: Domínguez Rubio, 2014.

313 These divisions can be illustrated by a quote from the interview with Jasmina Mertz, assistant curator responsible for the 'production' of one of the manifestations of Kruger's wall-wrap from the collection of Museum Ludwig in Cologne that will be discussed in detail in the next subchapter: "[...] for me, at this time it was important to install the piece and I did not have all these [AW: documentation-related] questions because these are questions from the collection [AW: point of view] and I am not involved in collecting, I am more interested in display. And these are really different and complicated questions" (J. Mertz, in-person interview, May 11, 2017).

was done mainly by consecutive project managers in charge of successive exhibitions featuring the piece. These separations entail the formation of internal, often competing priorities, or responsibilities being ceded from one part to another. One further example is the conservation-related documentation, which is kept in a separate archive that, due to its structure, is accessible only by or through conservation personnel. Researchers, whose responsibilities consist of in-depth study into the history of artworks, act as a link between conservators and curators, and their work informs the assignments of both. However, at SMA the aforementioned shift of priorities toward exhibiting has resulted in moving the research team from the collection to the curatorial department. In terms of museum practice, it means that most of the researchers' tasks are related to the organisation of temporary exhibitions, which usually differs from research carried out for the sake of collection documentation. The overall impression is that the common goal of the museum, i.e. ensuring the continuity of the work of art, gets dissolved within the internal dynamics of the institution. In my view, although thanks to existing procedures particular aspects of the artwork are taken care of, the aforementioned divisions get in the way of the artwork being considered and cared for as a whole, which could have a negative impact on its perpetuation.

This study has shown that the cluster of documents collected in various institutional archives can function as an artwork only if compared and juxtaposed. For example, the collected 'digital object' (drawings) can only be interpreted together with the photographs and statements recorded in the interview with Hwie-Bing Kwee, the Omnimark project manager, in which he mentions the final alterations made by the artist. This juxtaposition supports not only the comprehension of the artwork but also the identification of gaps in the documentation. As the example of '360°' demonstrated, the creation of a common, easily accessible space where the documents can interact supports the understanding of the artwork and in consequence its care, while their distribution among various repositories may potentially hinder the process. Although the current system is not devoid of limitations and its potential is not fully exploited, it provides the possibility of accumulating information and allowing documents to overlap and be juxtaposed, which, according to Rinehart, can mitigate the loss caused in the process of musealisation (Rinehart & Ippolito, 2014, see: section 4.1 of this Chapter).

4.4   Other 'Musealised' Wall-Wraps

The condition of *Untitled* (*Past, Present, Future*) in the SMA collection exemplifies one way a wall-wrap can be musealised. However, it is not the only institutionally collected room installation by Kruger. The preliminary survey of the artist's practice made it possible to identify two more instances, one in Los Angeles and one in Cologne. How have other institutions handled the transformation of a Kruger wall-wrap into a collectible? Have they faced similar challenges as the SMA? The following subchapter addresses these questions by presenting a study on institutionalised wall-wraps carried out at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Museum Ludwig Cologne. The differences between these various approaches offers further evidence of how the musealisation of a complex, concept-based piece is a process contingent on different factors, where the relationship between the artist and the institution plays a crucial role. This phase in the research enabled me to collect additional factual information and to assess the scope of possible negotiations with the artist during the upcoming interview.

4.4.1   Untitled (Shafted), 2008 from LACMA

Untitled (*Shafted*), 2008, was commissioned for a newly opened BCAM (Broad Contemporary Art Museum) building within the campus of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), and installed on the walls of the main, centrally located elevator shaft (Figure 52). Similarly to the SMA case, it took several years for the artwork to be acquired for the collection, which finally took place in 2011. What makes the two artworks different is the role of the location – LACMA's wall-wrap has a fixed location that dialogues with the title, whereby the piece can be interpreted as site-specific. Nevertheless, the contract signed between the museum and the artist does not specify it as such.[314] The artwork is defined there as a digital image submitted to the museum on a CD, and the institution is free not only to reprint the

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314   Due to the museum's data protection policy, it was not possible to consult the artwork's documentation, which is classified. The factual information in this section originates from an interview conducted with Chanelle Mandell (Registration Administrator, Permanent Collection, Registration and Collections at LACMA) and Janice Schopfer (Head of Paper Conservation at LACMA).

Figure 52. Barbara Kruger, *Untitled* (*Shafted*). Installation view at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Photographer: A. B. Wielocha.

existing wallpaper but also to reformat it and show it in other locations.[315] Should it be reinstalled elsewhere, the artist can be consulted, but her presence is not listed in the contract as an obligatory condition. This agreement was designed by the museum's Legal Department in collaboration with the Registration Department and accepted by the artist. The conservation staff was involved neither in the installation nor in the acquisition of the piece.

Although LACMA is aware of the need to expand traditional documentation methods and the value of conducting artist interviews, in the case of *Untitled* (*Shafted*) this was not deemed necessary, as the purchase agreement is believed to be detailed enough to guarantee the persistence of the piece. However, as Chanelle Mandell (Registration Administrator, Permanent Collection, Registration and Collections) assured, despite the provisions of the contract, such instances as the loan request or the change of the location would certainly be consulted with Kruger, as the museum holds artworks'

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315   "Basically, the artwork is a digital image that we have on the CD, and we can print it in the way we want to" (C. Mandell, in-person interview, September 9, 2016).

integrity to be a top priority.[316] In short, while the institution remains open to further discussion with the artist, it maintains the right to make decisions that guarantee its own independence and flexibility.

4.4.2   Untitled, 1994/1995 from Museum Ludwig Cologne

The wall-wrap from the collection of the Museum Ludwig in Cologne was originally designed for Mary Boone Gallery in New York and presented there in 1994 (Figure 53).[317] In 1995, after the New York show, it was acquired by the Peter Ludwig Foundation and permanently loaned to the Museum Ludwig Cologne, where it was immediately installed (Figure 54).[318] The museum archive holds a note which confirms that Kruger was actively involved in the first reinstallation of the piece and visited the museum twice before the show: the first time most likely to choose the space and the second to supervise the process.[319]

Unlike other wall-wraps discussed in this chapter, the first two manifestations of the piece were created prior to the digital era and screen-printed. What entered the museum collection was a set of prints made for a specific location. The actual 'object of acquisition' and technical requirements for its display were specified in a letter from the gallerist Mary Boone, who mediated the conditions of the purchase:

> As per our conversation BARBARA KRUGER has agreed to execute this work in a room not smaller than 6 by 9 meters. In order for the Work to have the desired impact it must have this scale. […] We understand that you and the museum would like to install this Work on additional occasions. In order to make it possible Barbara will provide you with three printings of this

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316   C. Mandell, in-person interview, September 9, 2016.

317   Exhibition *Barbara Kruger*, Mary Boone Gallery New York, 1994. For more about the show see: Goldstein et al., 1999, p. 171.

318   Exhibition *Unser Jahrhundert*, 9 July 1995 -10 August 1995, Museum Ludwig Cologne.

319   There are copies of faxes and letters kept in the archive of Museum Ludwig which confirm that the first trip was made at the beginning of May (3-7 May 1995) and the second from 26 June – 2 July 1995. See: Goodrow, G. A. (1995, May 9). [Letter to Barbara Kruger]. Museum Ludwig Archive. Cologne.

Figure 53. Barbara Kruger, Untitled (1994/1995). Installation view of the exhibition Barbara Kruger at Mary Boone Gallery, New York, 1994. Photographer: unknown. Source: Alberro, A., Gever, M., Kwon, M., Squiers, C., Foster, H., & Kruger, B. (2010). Barbara Kruger. New York: Rizzoli, pp. 210.

> installation. You will also receive a certificate from the Artist that entitles you to additional reprintings. (Boone, M. (1995, March 15). [Letter to Marc Scheps]. Museum Ludwig Archive. Cologne)

This excerpt proves that from the outset the possibility of re-installing the piece in another setting was under consideration. The screen prints on the walls were complemented by magnesium plates inserted into the imitation-granite vinyl-tile floor (Figure 57). Kruger emphasised the significance of the plates in an interview conducted by art historian Carol Squiers the year of the artwork's creation:

> Those plaques [magnesium plates] were all questions, and I tried to use humor in them. When you first came in, the one you saw was a man shaking his finger – and to me that is the slogan for the whole show. It says, "How dare you not be me?" That's the dance. That was a sort of mantra for the entire installation. (Squiers, 1995, p. 65)

The work was shown again in 1996, this time in Melbourne, where it was adapted to the architectural context of the display space (Figure 55).[320] The fourth public presentation of the artwork took place in 1999 at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) in Los Angeles during the retrospective exhibition curated by Ann Goldstein.[321] In this instance the conditions of the loan were negotiated between both museums in advance, and MOCA requested the production of an exhibition copy under the supervision of the artist.[322] In 2003, the artwork went on loan again, this time for the purpose of the show organised by the Kunstmuseum in Lucerne (Figures 56-57).[323]

After a decade, the work was displayed again at the Ludwig Museum.[324] Kruger commented on that instance in an interview conducted by Beatriz Colomina and Mark Wigley in the following words:

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320   Exhibition *Barbara Kruger*, 17 October – 24 November 1996, Museum of Modern Art, Heide, Melbourne. For more information about the show see: Cotter, J. (1996). Barbara Kruger. Retrieved from http://www.artdes.monash.edu.au/non-cms/globe/issue4/bkrutxt.html. Interestingly, there is no record of this exhibition among the loans listed either in the Museum Ludwig archive or in the collection record available online (see: https://www.kulturelles-erbe-koeln.de/documents/obj/05023084). Thus, my recognition of the piece as the one owned by the Museum Ludwig relied only on the images available in catalogues and on the Internet. Taking into account Kruger's practice of self-appropriation of images and texts as well as the lack of distinctive titles, the installation shown in Melbourne could also be a separate variation on (not an instantiation of) the one from Cologne.

321   Exhibition *Barbara Kruger*, 17 October 1999 – 13 February 2000, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. For a detailed description of the show see: Goldstein et al., 1999.

322   "[MOCA] will provide all the materials for the reproduction, tailoring it to the space of the exhibition. In addition, the exhibition copy […] will be credited to the Museum Ludwig Cologne and destroyed upon the completion of the exhibition" (Koshalek, R. (1999, April 15). [Email to Jochen Poetter]. Museum Ludwig Archive. Cologne).

323   Exhibition *Me & More*, 9 August – 23 November 2003, Kunstmuseum Luzern. For a detailed description of the show see: Fischer, 2003. This loan is listed in the artwork's record, but unfortunately is not documented, so the details of its conditions remain unknown. Nevertheless, the early 2000s were marked by a technological shift in Kruger's practice from traditional to digital printing, and so it is possible that the Lucerne version was printed digitally. In the catalogue of the exhibition the work is listed as "*Untitled, 1994* – photographic prints, vinyl tiles, photo engraving on magnesium tiles, sound" (Fischer, 2003, p. 139), where "prints" could mean either analogue or digital.

324   Exhibition *Not Yet Titled: New and Forever at Museum Ludwig*, October 11, 2013 to January 26, 2014; see: Not Yet Titled: New and Forever at Museum Ludwig. (2012). Retrieved from http://www.museum-ludwig.de/en/exhibitions/archive/2013/not-yet-titled.html

I'm also remaking an earlier installation that was purchased by the
Museum Ludwig in Cologne in 1995. But I had originally done it for
a particular space and I'm now altering it to work in a differently scaled
room in the museum that will allow for an aerial viewing. So I'm changing
the configuration of the floor to accommodate that kind of sight line.
(Colomina & Wigley, 2014, p. 125)

Figure 54. Barbara Kruger, Untitled (1994/1995). Installation view of the exhibition *Unser Jahrhundert*, Museum Ludwig Cologne. Photographer: unknown. Source: Rheinisches Bildarchiv Köln. Retrieved from: https://www.kulturelles-erbe-koeln.de/documents/obj/05023084.

Figure 55. Barbara Kruger, Untitled (1994/1995). Installation view of the exhibition *Barbara Kruger* at the Museum of Modern Art, Heide, Melbourne. Photographer: unknown. Source: Linker, K. (1990). Love for Sale: The Words and Pictures of Barbara Kruger. (H. N. Abrams, Ed.). New York, p. 150.
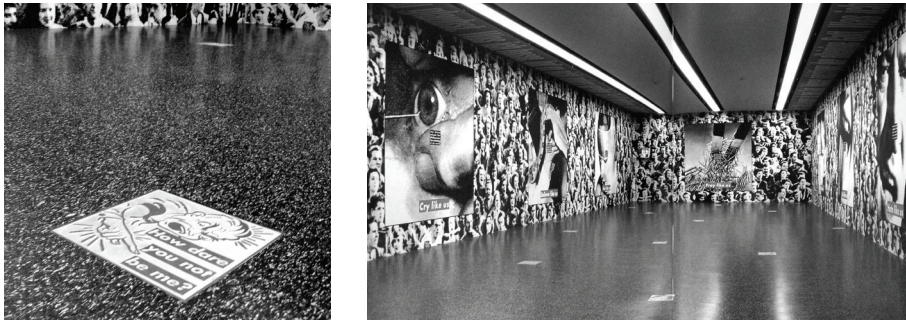
Figure 56. Barbara Kruger, Untitled (1994/1995). Installation view of the exhibition Exhibition Me & More at Kunstmuseum Luzern. Photographer: unknown. Source: Alberro, A., Gever, M., Kwon, M., Squiers, C., Foster, H., & Kruger, B. (2010). Barbara Kruger. New York: Rizzoli, pp. 210-211.

As the excerpt indicates, the museum together with the artist decided to change the original location of the piece and install it in another part of the building. Along with the location, Kruger importantly modified the concept (Figure 58). Although, as the excerpt from the interview conducted by Squiers demonstrates, the messages on the magnesium plates were significant to the understanding of the artwork, these, together with the vinyl-tile floor, were replaced by white words on a red background printed on synthetic film. Sentences bordering the upper part of the walls were translated from English into German and the wallpaper was printed digitally on vinyl film.[325]

4.4.3   Summary: Towards the interview

There are various ways Kruger's wall-wraps can be musealised and later on used as a musealium, and both depend on the context, circumstances and general strategies or/and policies of the institutions involved. At the SMA the acquisition relied on the mutual trust between the artist and the museum, or rather the artist and the director – no contract was signed and the conditions of the agreement, especially in

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325   There are several documents in the Museum Ludwig archive that describe the production process, e.g. a short undated report by curator Jasmina Merz entitled: *Anmerkungen zur Installationder Arbeit Untitled (lnv.-Nr. ML 01611) von Barbara Kruger für die Ausstellung Not Yet Titled. Neu und für immer im Museum Ludwig (11. Oktober 2013 bis 26. Januar 2014)*.

terms of the authority over the artwork, clearly benefited the artist.[326] LACMA was more interested in protecting the interests of its collection and the artist agreed to concede an important part of the control over her work to the institution. The story of the piece from Museum Ludwig demonstrated that a wall-wrap can be loaned to other institutions and repeatedly adapted to different spaces, which confirms the previous assumption that its site-specificity is more related to more related to the use of architectural surfaces as a support than to the core concept of the work. The study of five different manifestations of *Untitled, 1994/1995* from Museum Ludwig Cologne prompted a question as to whether it would be feasible to register patterns in the artwork's transformations and consequently to construct a set of guidelines for its future presentations. And if so, would it be possible to apply a similar strategy to the piece from the SMA?

At this stage my understanding of *Untitled* (*Past, Present, Future*) was that of a set of components which, following certain rules and constraints, can be employed in infinite combinations.[327] This observation was made on the basis of the assumption that the limitation to three manifestations is not a meaningful, conceptual condition, but rather a practical provision to limit the artist's involvement in the 'adult' life of her works.[328] Following Nelson Goodman's distinction between allographicity and autographicity as used by scholars in the field of contemporary art conservation, Kruger's artwork can be classified as allographic, which opens up the possibility for re-performing it in

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326 Interestingly, the SMA does not work with acquisition contracts on a regular basis. Many works from the collection have no contracts at all; however, with the emergence of copyright issues – especially complicated in the case of video art – this practice is gradually changing.

327 In my understanding the components are: the set of all the text used in the three consecutive manifestations, the size of the room, and the relationships between the texts and colours.

328 The concept of artworks having 'life stages' from infancy to adulthood is persistent within the contemporary art conservation literature, see e.g.: Laurenson & Van Saaze, 2014; Phillips, 2012; Williams & Scheidemann, 2001.

the future.[329] What was lacking in order to open up this option was a 'score' or 'script' which could guide future presentations. After analysing the history of the artwork's transformations throughout its consecutive manifestations, I started to consider the possibility of designing guidelines or instructions enabling future adaptations of the piece to other spaces, following Kruger's way of thinking about the relationships between the words and a particular space. This solution would require a precise specification of the features which tie together the separate elements of the installation and make them function as a coherent piece. Would it be possible to invite the artist to (re)define the artwork 'independently from the medium', understanding 'the medium' as the walls and floors of particular spaces within the Stedelijk Museum?[330] Undoubtedly, the design of this kind of instructions would require close collaboration with the artist and her willingness to grant a part of the control over the final result to the artwork's institutional keeper. At this stage, the time had finally come to approach the artist herself.

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329   Nelson Goodman's concept of 'allographicity', developed in the context of the performing arts, has been employed to devise conservation frameworks that account for differences between manifestations of artworks which have no singular or fixed physical presence. It was introduced in the field of conservation of time-based media art by Pip Laurenson (2006). However, it is important to highlight that since then this binary division has been critically discussed among academics, e.g. Renée van de Vall (2015). Despite the criticism, Goodman's distinction has become a useful reference while speaking about different approaches to the perpetuation of contemporary artworks. See: Nelson Goodman, Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols (1968) (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 2009); Caianiello, T. (2012). Materializing the Ephemeral: The Preservation and Presentation of Media Art Installations. In R. Buschmann & T. Caianiello, Media art installations: preservation and presentation: materializing the ephemeral (1st ed., pp. 207-229). Berlin: Reimer.

330   The idea to '(re)define the artwork independently from the medium' comes from Variable Media Paradigm, introduced in the framework of Variable Media Network, whose methodology is based on "seeking to define acceptable levels of change within any given art object and document ways in which a sculpture, installation, or conceptual work may be altered (or not) for the sake of preservation, without losing that work's essential meaning. The Variable Media approach integrates the analysis of materials with the definition of an artwork independently from its medium, allowing the work to be translated once its current medium becomes obsolete" ("The Variable Media Initiative," n.d.). See also: Depocas, A., Ippolito, J., Jones, C., Daniel Langlois Foundation for Art, Science and Technology., & Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation. (2003). Permanence through change : La permanence par le changement : *The variable media approach : L'approche des médias variables.* New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications.

4.5   The Interview

> A 'successful' interview – one that perhaps produces a nice coherent and fluent
> narrative containing a balance between information and reflection – is likely
> to be the product of shared values between the parties, a good rapport and the
> willingness of the interviewer to permit the respondent to shape the narrative,
> avoiding unnecessary interjections. An 'unsuccessful' interview – one that fails
> to produce a coherent narrative, in which the respondent offers short or factual
> answers to questions without elaboration or reflection – may have its roots in
> a poor interview relationship, lack of empathy or rapport, and an absence of
> understanding or comprehension on both sides. Of course, these are rather
> value-laden definitions of success and its opposite, but many would agree that
> the interview relationship (alongside good preparation) is the key to eliciting
> a narrative response. (Abrams, 2010, p. 11)

> It is inevitable that there will be discrepancies between the desired result and the
> actual interview. This does not mean that the interview is less valuable.
> (Beerkens et al., 2012, p. 47)

4.5.1   Conservation and Artist Interviews at the Stedelijk

One factors that shapes the outcome of an interview is the scope of interests of the
interviewer, which depends on the purpose of the investigation. As this dissertation
focuses on the use of novel documentation practices within the framework of a museum,
the decision was made to prepare the encounter with the artist not as an independent
researcher but as a representative of an institution. This required familiarity with
general institutional policy on interviewing artists for conservation purposes. At the
SMA this policy is not a written set of rules, but a body of knowledge formed through
practices developed over time and shaped by the range of available resources.

The SMA's Conservation Department is divided between traditional disciplines,
and the sub-departments are independent from each other in terms of approaches
and procedures.[331] Sculpture conservators, responsible for various artworks from the

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[331]   Other ramifications of the Conservation Department have their own practices related to the
inclusion of the artist's statements in the conservation-related documentation. For instance,
paper conservators usually send a detailed questionnaire to the artist or the gallery with queries
about materials used and framing. Source: R. Timmermans, in-person interview, April 11, 2017.

collection which are non-traditional from a formal perspective, such as installations, understand the artist interview as any contact with artists or their representatives, who could also be galleries or family members. These interviews can be done by email, by phone or in-person. In most cases there is a specific reason to reach out, and often the initiative is undertaken because of actual conservation or exhibition-related problems. Based on the time spent preparing, which in turn determines the depth of questioning, according to the *INCCA Guide to Good Practice* (2002) this sort of interview would be called 'brief' or 'limited'. Oral communication is usually not recorded; the result is summarised by the interviewer (conservator) in a so-called 'object form', which belongs to the body of conservation-oriented documentation.[332] The set of issues to be discussed during the interview determines the involvement of curators or researchers from the curatorial department. Nevertheless, curators are always invited to ask whatever questions they might have, even if they are not strictly conservation related. The SMA's Conservation Department does conduct 'extended' artist interviews as well, which 'invite the artist to speak freely about his/her work' (Guide to good practice: Artists' interviews, 2002).[333] However, these 'extended' interviews are not a part of the everyday practice and are usually linked to major conservation-related projects involving collaboration with external professionals and/or interns, and above all require additional funding.[334] Since the circumstances of my investigation afforded sufficient time and funding, and because apart from collecting information related to the artwork my goal was to test the model of the interview as proposed in Chapter 1 (p. 61), the interview with Kruger was planned from the outset as an 'extended' one.

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332   R. Timmermans, in-person interview, April 11, 2017.

333   For instance, the project of documenting and reinstalling two installations by Joan Jonas, carried out by the Stedelijk conservation team together with external researchers in 2009, included several in-depth interviews conducted with the artist. See: Mink, A., (2009) *Dossier: Organic Honey, Sweeney Ashtray, het behound en beheer van twee installaties in het Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam*, the archive of the Conservation Department, SMA, Amsterdam. I would like to express my gratitude to Sandra Weerdenburg for providing access to the internal documentation of the SMA's Conservation Department.

334   Information about the Stedelijk Conservation Department's practices related to artist interviews has been collected through an interview with Sculpture Conservator Rebecca Timmermans (R. Timmermans, in-person interview, April 11, 2017).

4.5.2   <u>Methodology and Planning</u>

The personal encounter that is at the heart of the artist interview may be approached in different ways and may acquire different meanings depending on methodology, employed perspective and the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee. Before proceeding to recount and analyse my interview with Barbara Kruger, I will introduce concepts addressing these three aforementioned subjects (method, perspective and relationship): in-depth interviewing, topic versus resource, and quality of interaction. These concepts will lay the groundwork for the subsequent analysis of both the encounter and its outcome, and make it possible to ponder over their accomplishments and failures.

In the definition of the artist interview proposed at the beginning of this dissertation, the formal approach to the interview understood as an encounter is framed as an oral, semi-structured, guided conversation with an artist where the interviewer plays the role of a guide (see: Chapter 1, p. 61). From a methodological perspective the approach that best matches these characteristics is in-depth interviewing. In-depth interviews are long-duration, involve a face-to-face interaction between an interviewer and an interviewee, and seek 'deep' information and knowledge (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012). Researchers use in-depth interviewing as a way to check theories that they have formulated during their preliminary investigation; to independently verify factual knowledge gained through archival research, etc.; or to explore multiple meanings of or perspectives on actions, events, or settings (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012). This method is recommended in instances where the research questions involve highly conflicted emotions, and where individuals involved in the same activity (in this case the perpetuation of an artwork) might have multiple perspectives on the researched subject. To be effective and useful, in-depth interviews need to develop and build on a certain kind of intimacy, as they entail a process of mutual self-disclosure and trust building. The in-depth interview has its own particular dynamics, and more often than in other interview formats it takes unexpected turns or digressions that follow the interviewee's interests and areas of knowledge. Such digressions or diversions might be highly productive, and the interviewer should be prepared to deviate from the script and follow the path set by the interviewee. However, as experts advise, it is also essential to be assertive enough to return to the main course if necessary (Johnson &

Rowlands, 2012). Deep interviewing requires deep listening – hearing not only what your own intellectual development, beliefs, convictions and/or preliminary research have prepared you to hear, but, more importantly, what your informant really says.

In his manual for qualitative interviewing, sociologist Clive Seale distinguishes between two different approaches to analysing an interview – as a resource and/or as a topic (Seale, 1998). While in the first case the interview is a method to explore, gather or verify information provided by the interviewee, in the second the interest shifts towards the dynamics of the interview as a social event in its own right. While in the context of the artist interview the first perspective is evident, the value of the second one is less acknowledged. The development of the interpersonal dynamics and the power relations between the participants may provide significant information (e.g. about the artist's attitude towards conservation) as well as help to decide on the future development of the collaboration (e.g. if it is feasible to arrange a follow-up interview). When the interview is tackled as a topic, it needs to be scrutinised in the context of the encounter – how, when and why it was set up, where and when it took place, by whom, for whom, and for what purpose (Bryson & McConville, 2014). An accurate account of the circumstances surrounding the development of the interaction can be extracted from the phone-calls, notes or emails exchanged prior to the interview, as well as any follow-up communication.

The descriptions of both of the foregoing concepts refer to the significance of the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee and its influence on the way the interview may unfold. As psychologist John Chirban noted, the true sense of the word interview is 'inner view', and originates from its French root 'entre-voir' – to get a glimpse of, 's'entrevoir' – to see each other (Chirban, 1996). Mutual comprehension of emotions and motivations between individuals is considered key to any interview situation: building a good rapport can spell the difference between a successful interview and a failed one, between obtaining the required data or not. However, establishing a rapport with the interviewee is a difficult and rather time-consuming endeavour, and, based on my own experience, often turns out to be a failed enterprise. The two participants in the encounter usually have different agendas, and while that of the researcher – to gather knowledge relevant to his or her project – is usually easily recognisable, that of the narrator might vary. In the case of the artist interview, the

common ground between the two interlocutors is usually an interest in the future of the artwork in question. However, this may not always be the case. Although there are some artists who do not care if or how their artwork will be preserved, others might be keen on providing those in charge of caring for their work with all manner of information.

A relationship of trust and mutual understanding can be achieved by many different means. The tradition of feminist scholarship brought to social research the conviction that the basis for establishing rapport is transparency. According to sociologist Ann Oakley, researchers should inform narrators about the purposes of their research and the possible uses of their research findings, and be open to answering questions about their own opinions (Oakley, 1981; Seale, 1998). Another way of building a good interaction is through the use of open-ended questions, leading and loaded questions, agreements and disagreements with respondents, and so on (Jones, 1985; Seale, 1998). However, there are no rules when it comes to putting these tools into practice, and the choice of the approach depends, once again, on the circumstances in which the relationship started and how it unfolded. The important point is to reflect on the interviewer-interviewee interaction and to acknowledge the ways in which it may influence the nature of the outcome.

The stated aim of the interview with Kruger was to establish, together with the artist, a conservation strategy for wall-wraps collected by museums, with a focus on *Untitled (Past, Present, Future)* from the collection of the SMA. Following the ideas expressed in the opening chapter of this dissertation (see: Chapter 1, p. 36), this can be done on the basis of the artwork's key features: its conceptuality, contextuality, processuality and media variability as conceived by the artist, documented in her or his stories. Although the main research question guiding the interview was how to secure the perpetuation of the artwork, the artist was not expected to answer this question herself. I planned to elicit the stories that might provide insight into the nature of the artwork through 'how' questions centred not on the artwork but on the artist herself, for instance: How did you start working with spatial installations? How do you go about preparing immersive installations? How do you adapt existing wall-wraps to new settings? Although many of these stories were collected during the preliminary research, the interview provides the possibility of juxtaposing the information encountered in written sources with

personal accounts, and of making those different versions interact and overlap to create, following Rinehart's concept of accumulation (see: p. 222), a more accurate representation of the artwork.

The exhaustive research into Kruger's artistic practice guided the design of the interview's script, which was divided into several blocks of questions. The first one addressed Kruger's general approach to wall-wraps as a distinct genre in her oeuvre, including their history and development, and her creative process and practice as an artist. The second block was related to the musealisation of Kruger's wall-wraps and her approach to their consecutive adaptations to various spaces. The third block started with questions addressing the persistence of institutionalised wall-wraps. I decided to open up a space for a reflective response by asking Kruger to imagine possible futures of the piece from the SMA's collection, and to let her develop her own ideas. The latter, conservation-related part ended with the key question addressing the possibility of writing installation instructions to allow for future adaptations of the wall-wraps to different spaces without the artist's involvement. The rest of the script was divided into two alternative options to be applied according to Kruger's reaction to this idea. One elaborated on the subject with detailed queries, while the other, more focused on practical details related to the display of the work, was meant to release any tension if the artist had a negative reaction to the proposal.

The initial plan was to interview Kruger at the SMA on the occasion of her visit to Amsterdam for the third display of *Untitled* (*Past, Present, Future*). In that case the interview would probably have been conducted alongside an SMA employee, most likely from the curatorial department. Unfortunately, I had to adjust to both the institutional schedule and my own research plan. Since the museum was constantly postponing the announcement of the exhibition's opening date due to logistical issues, I finally decided to act on my own and arrange a meeting with the artist independently. The script of the interview was presented to and consulted with SMA employees.[335] After an initial email exchange with the artist in which the purpose of the interview was explained in detail, we scheduled a meeting in New York City, Kruger's hometown.

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335   By Rebecca Timmermans from the Conservation Department and Margriet Schavemaker from the Curatorial Department.

4.5.3   The Encounter

> We are all inclined to see people in social categories and to temper our approach
> accordingly. The story of a weekend away can be presented in numerous different
> ways (to a taxi driver, your colleagues, a spouse, children, your best friend, a law
> enforcement officer or a counsellor). The structure and relative formality of
> a research interview should minimise frivolity and facetiousness, but the process
> of 'reading' one another is still an integral part of the interview process.
> (Bryson & McConville, 2014, p. 138)

Building on Seale's (1998) twofold method for analysing interviews – as a topic and/
or a resource – this section combines both perspectives to show how one influences the
other. The interview as a social event took place at a location proposed by the artist,
a café in Greenwich Village. Only after listening to the recording of the meeting did
I realise the importance of the Oral History Society's advice on choosing the interview
site: "Unless part of the [...] process includes gathering soundscapes, historically
significant sound events, or ambient noise, the interview should be conducted in
a quiet room with minimal background noises and possible distractions" ("Principles
and Best Practices for Oral History | Oral History Association", 2012). The problem
was not only that the noise of the coffee maker rendered entire utterances inaudible
in the recording, but also that in the interview itself the participant and I at times
had trouble understanding one another. Indeed, I had not taken into account the
language difference; Kruger speaks American English, which I am not familiar with.
Meanwhile, I speak 'international' English, with a fair share of borrowed constructions
and expressions, combined with a foreign accent. The presence of constant background
noise caused multiple misinterpretations of particular words. This, together with the
specificity of Kruger's digressive way of constructing her narrative, severely affected
the course of the interview. The general feeling was that the aim of specific questions
was not transparent to the artist and therefore her responses to the queries were neither
clear nor direct. In order to obtain concrete information, I had to return to the same
question over and over again. Understandably, the flow of the dialogue forced us to
stray from the script. At one point I became so desperate to 'save' the interview that
I started to interrupt the artist's digressions with queries. The interview's transcript
reveals how, at a certain point, I grew impatient and forced the question regarding the
possibility of re-installing wall-wraps without the artist's involvement.

AW: We have this piece in the collection and they [AW: future museum curators] will reinstall it in 100 years in some way, and the idea behind our conversation is to collect your thoughts about how to do it in the future, as close to how you would like to have it as possible. What would be your vision then?

BK: I don't want the text to change. I don't want the image to change. I mean – who is going to do that?

AW: But two of the pieces have already changed...we have at least two different variations...the text changed...

BK: I've changed the text. But if I am not around...

AW: You don't want anybody to change it.

BK: Who is going to change the text? The meaning?? The words?? No! (B. Kruger, in-person interview, July 12, 2017)

Following Abrams's definition quoted at the opening of this subchapter, the interview conducted with Kruger could be considered unsuccessful. Due to the lack of rapport between participants, it failed to produce a coherent narrative and the responses of the participant were rather short, without elaboration and reflection. To understand the reason for this failure I will analyse the dynamic of the interaction, starting from the initial contact with the artist. During the preparatory research for the interview I carefully studied existing correspondence between Kruger and the SMA. Although the main focus of that study was to extract factual information that could help with writing a biography of *Untitled* (*Past, Present, Future*), it also gave me a glimpse into the personality of my future narrator. Emails addressed to museum employees portray Kruger as frank, self-confident and rather unkeen on changing her mind or adapting to the situation. She is a strong, charismatic woman with clear ideas, and besides that an internationally renowned artist, a legend of the New York art scene whose work has been presented in and collected by the most influential art institutions around the globe. In the emails exchanged prior to the interview, Kruger was courteous and expressed her appreciation of my interest in her work. However, when I presented the purpose of my research, she responded as if the future of her spatial installations would not be an issue whatsoever:

I am interested specifically in your 'wall-wraps' and I am looking at those that had been acquired into public collection: the piece from the Stedelijk, the one from Museum Ludwig in Cologne and the one from LACMA. The focus of my research is to find a way to document these artworks in order to be able to reinstall them in the future. (Wielocha, A. (2017, March 16). [Email to Barbara Kruger]. 2012.1.0189 Objectdossier, '360°' SMA virtual archive, Amsterdam)

When the Stedelijk purchased the installation (which meant so much to me), the agreement was for 3 versions of the work to fit the space. This will be the third one. The LACMA work was specifically made for the elevator and will not be done to suit another space. The Ludwig reinstallation of a few years ago thrilled me because under the previous team at the museum there was little interest in my work, so Philipp Kaiser's invitation to give the work new life was so appreciated. That's the story. (Wielocha, A. (2017, March 16). [Email to Barbara Kruger]. 2012.1.0189 Objectdossier, '360°' SMA virtual archive, Amsterdam)

Both aspects touched upon in the foregoing paragraphs – strong personality, the authority of the artist over her artwork, as well as an alleged lack of engagement in the investigated issue – undermined my entry into the interaction. For me this interview was the culmination of several months of intense research, a reason to cross the Atlantic, an expected highlight of my investigation and, above all, an opportunity to confirm my theories. What undoubtedly influenced the course of the event was a strong belief in the sense and validity of my approach to wall-wraps as performances that can be re-enacted according to a script designed together with the artist. Although during the interview Kruger indirectly confirmed that the limitation to three manifestations of the piece from the SMA was intended to avoid being endlessly involved in the same task instead of working on new projects, she firmly stated that she did not want the piece to be modified without her involvement. And yet, instead of listening to and following the opinions of the interviewee, I was desperately looking for any occasion to explain my strategy, hoping that this would open a gateway to further negotiations.

However, after a careful analysis of both the data collected during the encounter as well as the interview as a social event, I am convinced that the remark by Berkeens et al. quoted at the beginning of this chapter, stating that even an interview that does not fulfil expectations might be a valuable one, is still applicable to the final result of the project. During the interview, Kruger took a firm stance regarding further adaptations of the SMA piece, explaining her approach to the continuity of the work and providing a clear reference for future decision-makers.[336] Moreover, the conversation made it possible to confirm certain suppositions and discard others. One of the most interesting moments was when Kruger reflected on the nature of the work from the SMA collection by recognising the three instantiations as, in fact, three different artworks.[337] Furthermore, the conversation brought up new factual information that might prove useful in planning how her work is displayed in the future. For instance, Kruger discussed her approach to dating her work, as well as to translating its linguistic content from various languages.[338] On a practical level, the encounter made it possible to complete a set of preservation-strategy recommendations regarding *Untitled* (*Past, Present, Future*) for the SMA, which without the artist's opinion would be based on speculation, and as such scarcely reliable. However, at one point in the conversation, the artist openly expressed her scepticism towards the proposed documentation strategy that was to include the artist's opinion. When I recalled once again one of the goals of our meeting, by explaining that recording the artist's view on the future of the artwork may prevent its keepers from altering its meaning and doing "whatever they want", she

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336 "BK: This is site specific, this work [AW: the Stedelijk piece], and this is the third and the last time that I am, that we are, doing it. So the three installs, [...] you can use any of the spaces that have been used before" (B. Kruger, in-person interview, July 11, 2017). In addition, she firmly expressed her disapproval of another person introducing any changes in the artwork (quoted on p. 191).

337 "BK: Yes, sure. Three.... It is actually...separate works in so many ways, it is not the same work.
AW: It is not the same work?
BK: Like this last one, I didn't have a stairway in the other work, so there is another text. [...]
AW: So you think that those three variations of the Stedelijk piece are indeed three separate pieces?
BK: There are in many ways three separate works" (B. Kruger, in-person interview, July 12, 2017).

338   B. Kruger, in-person interview, July 12, 2017.

Figure 59. Barbara Kruger, *Untitled* (*Past, Present, Future*). Installation view of the exhibition *The Collection, STEDELIJK BASE*, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. Photographer: A. B. Wielocha.

responded with a shrug: "But they will do it anyway!"[339] This statement indicates that Kruger is aware of the consequences of the musealisation of her intrinsically temporary artworks, and acknowledges the impossibility of controlling their future careers.

The examination of the concept of the artist interview as defined at the outset of this dissertation requires a consideration of the last step of the process: post-production, or, in other words, converting the interview into a stable source. In practical terms the whole process was ultimately represented across numerous documents, including:

- the collection of scans from sources used in the course of the research (images, press clippings, excepts from catalogues, previous interviews with the artist, notes from interviews with other parties involved, etc.);

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339   "AW: Ok. But let's look at it from a different side. When artworks enter a collection and start to be owned by an institution they also start to be used by an institution in many different ways. Curators are telling their own stories with those works. And I assume that it is good to know what an artist thinks about the possible use of her artwork, to make the owner conscious about her concept and opinion. And I think that if the artist statement is not recorded, they can do whatever they want with the artwork in the future.
BK: But they will do it anyway!" (B. Kruger, in-person interview, July 12, 2017).

- the report from the preliminary research including the biography of the artwork supported with references, analysis of the artist's practices and possible analogies;

- the unedited audio recording of the encounter;

- the transcript of the interview with the description of the interview's purposes and circumstances, together with notes analysing the interaction of interviewer and interviewee;

- correspondence with the artist exchanged before and after the interview;

- the report on recommendations regarding possible preservation strategies for the artwork.

Besides the audio recording, this group of documents was deposited in the artwork's 'Object dossier' on '360°', where it can easily be put into interaction with other records. It has therefore become a component of the artwork-related documentation, or, if we hold that through musealisation a contemporary artwork transforms into documents, a part of the artwork itself.[340]

My contact with Kruger continued after I left New York. For the sake of the article written after finishing the empirical part of the investigation, I asked the artist for her approval to directly quote from the interview. In response, besides pointing out factual mistakes in the article, she firmly denied ever having referred to herself as a "graffiti artist" as Hwie-Bing Kwee remembered (see: p. 237), and stated that those are his terms and ideas.[341] Indeed, this comparison does not appear in any other interview conducted with the artist. She also expressed her deep disagreement with my intention of overcoming her desire to limit the presentation of *Untitled* (*Past, Present, Future*) to three manifestations, and stated that she alone, as the artist, has

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340   The audio recording could not be stored on '360°' because the platform does not support audio files.

341   This misunderstanding could be simply a language issue and Kruger very well may have said something like "What I make is like street art". Tate's art term database, for example, includes Kruger's work as an example of "street art": "Many well-known artists started their careers working in a way that we would now consider to be street art, for example, Gordon Matta-Clark, Jenny Holzer and Barbara Kruger" (https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/s/street-art). It makes perfect sense that a non-native speaker would conflate "graffiti artist" and "street art" as synonyms.

the authority to determine the appearance and meaning of the artwork. The email conveyed disappointment and discontent towards the 'subjective' character of my approach to our 'encounter'.

The new presentation of the Stedelijk collection featuring, among various prominent artworks, *Untitled* (*Past, Present, Future*)*,* opened at the end of 2017.[342] My fieldwork at the SMA had already come to an end several months earlier, and all resulting documents had been submitted early enough to inform the decisions related to the new display, so I was curious to what extent it actually influenced the final presentation. When I visited the site I immediately recalled Kruger's critique of 'smartphone culture' expressed during the interview.[343] Ironically, the new manifestation of her own piece became a favourite 'selfie spot' for SMA visitors and one of the most 'Instagrammed' artworks in the museum (Figure 59). However, this factor is clearly beyond the control of the hosting institution – the museum cannot force the visitors to read the phrases instead of photographing them, it is how today's public interacts with art. Nevertheless, there were a few other aspects touched upon in my report that influenced the final appearance of the work. During the interview I asked Kruger whether the issue of the authorship of the quotes that appear in her spatial installation should be addressed in wall labels. In response the artist stated that she always signs the quotes with the name of the author unless it is her own writing. When I showed her that in the drawings delivered for the third manifestation of the piece George Orwell's name was missing, she affirmed that this issue needed to be fixed, and in the final execution the quote from Orwell was properly referenced. Also, probably inspired by the artist's opinion, the wall label provided the English translation of the Dutch text. Nevertheless, in spite of Kruger's disagreement in the course of the interview with her work being compared to advertising, the wall label stated that "wall-wrap is a term borrowed from advertising". Ultimately, regardless of the artist's recorded opinions, the artwork's keepers are the ones who have power over it, and, in line with Kruger's stoic prediction, they do whatever they want.

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342   See: Stedelijk Base, the new collection presentation of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, will open on 16 December 2017. (2017). Retrieved from https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/news/ stedelijk-base-the-new-collection-presentation-of-the-stedelijk-museum-amsterdam-will-open-on-16-december-2017-2

343   B. Kruger, in-person interview, July 12, 2017

4.5.4   Summary: Failed interview, valid source

This case study has demonstrated common practical issues related to the use of artist interviews in an institutional framework. Despite the extensive preparation and elaborate methodological approach, the lack of rapport caused by the participants' differing agendas, among other factors, impeded a coherent narrative from emerging. Besides the obvious mistakes made during the course of the event as seen above, the development of rapport between two individuals is often a matter of luck. In the case of artist interviews, researchers are not able to choose their informants – usually there is one artist behind the collected artwork. The research team designated to conduct the interview is usually fixed, and consequently, to a certain extent the participants are 'stuck with each other'. Returning to the issue of distinct agendas, the idea that preservation should be of equal interest to both parties is rather utopic. For museums, ensuring the perpetuation of artworks is a stated duty, and many artists are keen on handing over this responsibility to institutions. Furthermore, artists often consider preservation differently, in much broader terms than institutions. In consequence, from the perspective of the artist interview, singling out rapport as an essential condition for a successful interview is perhaps as advisable as it is unrealistic.

However, although the collaboration did not shape up as intended, the encounter did serve to juxtapose the visions and opinions of two stakeholders. Despite the dubious quality of the interview from a methodological perspective, its stated goal – to establish a conservation strategy for *Untitled* (*Past, Present, Future*) together with the artist – was accomplished. The overall approach proposed by the conservator (me), which consisted of designing a script or instructions that would make it possible to re-enact the artwork in the future by adapting it to new architectural spaces, met with Kruger's rejection. In consequence, other possible options needed to be offered, in line with the three variations sanctioned by the artist.[344] Accordingly, whether seen as a general approach encompassing preparatory research and postproduction, or as the encounter itself, the interview proved to be a valid documentation method, and a suitable means of gathering data to inform decisions on the artwork's future. However, recognising that

344   Other options are proposed in the report prepared for Stedelijk, see: Wielocha, A. (August 2017). *Report on the State of Documentation and Recommendations Regarding Preservation Strategy for B. Kruger's Untitled* (*Past, Present, Future*), '360°' SMA virtual archive, Amsterdam.

the difficulties encountered during the process are common, hard to avoid, and difficult overcome, does not diminish the importance of a concise methodological approach. On the contrary, improving interviewing skills and learning from other fields that use in-depth interviews undoubtedly enhances the method's efficiency. Moreover, by considering the interview as a topic and not just a resource makes it possible to expand the knowledge-producing capacities of the source and make use of encounters even when they are 'unsuccessful'. And, as I will argue in the following paragraphs, from the perspective of the theoretical model of artwork-related documentation put forth in this dissertation, an unsuccessful interview is still better than no interview at all.

4.6 The Artist Interview's Many Functions within the Artwork-Related Documentation

Although Danh Vo and Barbara Kruger represent different generations of artists and the character of their work differs significantly, the accession of their works into institutional collections has had similar implications. The identity of the contemporary artworks by both artists has proven to be distributed between objects and processes, concepts and contexts that shape an artwork throughout its career. In the aftermath of entering the museum realm, these transient components were transformed into documents divided between the institution's various domains as a result of each museum's classification principles. This chapter has theorised this process by presenting this transformation as a shift in the ontological condition of a contemporary artwork from 'artwork' to its representation and a process intrinsic to musealisation. The case of *Untitled (Past, Present, Future)* has demonstrated that as a result of the partition between the collection and different institutional archives the identity of a contemporary artwork becomes blurred and its continuation compromised. Furthermore, this partition is one of the factors that impede the effective use of the new approaches to contemporary-art conservation developed over the last decades, including the artist interview.

The analysis of various museums' practices regarding conservation-related collaboration with artists (see: Chapter 3 and 4) revealed that museums tend to use the artist interview as defined in Chapter 1 only on special occasions. The more usual form of interaction with the artist on a day-to-day basis is a short, problem-based consultation in which conservators address concrete questions related to current problems. Sometimes it is held face-to-face but often is carried out by email or phone. These conversations are frequently briefly summarised in condition or treatment reports, or not documented at all, as in the case of the collaboration between Danh Vo and the curator from the SMK (see: Chapter 3, p. 195). The choice of this more direct communication is often dictated by constraints related to the allocation of time and money – the artist interview outlined as a process consisting of preparatory research, encounter and postproduction is a time-consuming assignment that requires personnel and infrastructure.

Why is it difficult to organise resources to finance this task? The study has shown that interviewing artists, although often officially acknowledged as important and necessary, is not perceived as pertaining to the domain of the collection. Rather, it is cast as a form of documentation, and as such is regarded as an auxiliary activity to collecting and conservation. In other words, it seems that museums generally fulfil their obligations concerning a musealium without interviewing artists, a practice regarded as supplementary. The reconceptualisation of a musealised contemporary artwork as a set of documents, as proposed in this dissertation, transforms the artist interview understood as a method into a tool for collecting and conserving; seen as a source, it re-emerges as a significant part of the artwork to be collected.

Although the predominance of consultation over interviewing is caused by the lack of time and funds, I would venture that this is not the only reason. As one of the conservators from the institutions studied stated in a private conversation: "sometimes it is better not to know".[345] The position of artists in the art world is twofold – on the one hand, they are often exploited as producers by art institutions, while on the other, they are praised in line with the Romantic myth of lone genius and the modern

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345   Personal communication. The author of this statement has chosen to remain anonymous.

concept of individuality.[346] The first perspective has a scarce presence in the backstage practices of museums, perhaps because the institutions are traditionally more committed to propagating and promoting the image of artists according to the second view. This results in a distance between museum workers and art workers, which often becomes a physical one – like in the common stories among conservators about being asked by a curator not to 'bother' artists with questions while they are busy installing their work.[347] This is especially visible in the case of renowned artists, who have the power of choosing institutional partners to work with and dictating their conditions for such collaborations. Why is it that "sometimes it is better not to know"? In the current setting, the artist's sanctions are seen as always superior to those of a museum professional, and little if any space is left for mediation. Therefore the artist's wish as expressed in an interview might result in a problem for curators, conservators, art handlers and registrars.[348] While the problem-based communication results usually in concrete instructions about what to do and what not to do, the in-depth interview

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346   The interaction between living artists and the museums collecting and displaying their work has always been complicated and especially in the last decades has been thought of in polemical terms. This difficult relationship, described by sociologist Vera L. Zolberg as akin to that of "suitors, duelists, petitioners and, sometimes, confederates" (Zolberg, 1992) has been the subject of research, mainly within the discipline of sociology. Examples: Rosenberg, B., & Fliegel, N. (1965). *The vanguard artist, portrait and self-portrait*. Chicago: Quadrangle Books; Burnham, S. (2000). *The art crowd*. Lincoln, Neb: iUniverse.com, Inc.; Ashton, D. (2006). *The New York School: A cultural reckoning*. Berkeley: University of California Press; Ericson, D. (1988). In the Stockholm art world. Stockholm: Dept. of Anthropology [Socialantropologiska institutionen], Univ.; Barrett, J., & Millner, J. (2014). *Australian Artists in the Contemporary Museum*. Florence: Taylor and Francis.

347   This attitude can be partially illustrated by the situation described in Chapter 2 (p. 144), where the interview with an artist is not considered an event or task in its own right, but fitted into another occasion: "A lot of the times you can speak to the artist when they are in to install something in a gallery. Quite often you almost have to nip in and the curator might say: our conservator would like to ask you a few questions. And then you nip in and ask them things" (In-person interview conducted with Tate conservator in January 2017. The name of the interviewee will remain anonymous in this study).

348   A similar observation was made already in the early 1990s by American sociologist Vera L. Zolberg, who stated that living artists are seen by museums as a potential problem and as trouble-makers: "Museums deal with artists directly only when they have to, and on their own terms. Among these terms is that the artist must support the museum in upholding the aesthetic ideology of the autonomous artwork" (Zolberg, 1992). Although since that time the interaction between institution and artist has gradually changed and nowadays, at least officially, it is more and more based on partnership, the impact of this problematic legacy remains visible in day-to-day collaborations.

might raise issues that are ambiguous, difficult to interpret and finally to implement in museum practice. The collaboration with Barbara Kruger portrayed in this chapter has been partially shaped by the dynamics of power as described above, and resulted in guidelines which significantly diminish possibilities of displaying the artwork in the future, thereby affecting the interests of the institution. That does not mean that the artist has no right to decide on the future on her work, but rather demonstrates potential consequences of the artist's involvement.

In consequence, another factor that keeps today's museums from exploiting the artist interview to its fullest potential is the complex nature of the relationship between artists and institutions. There is an entangled and unequal distribution of authority, and a lack of space for real collaboration with artists on caring for their work. As a way to tackle this issue on a theoretical level, this dissertation proposes implementing the model of artwork-related documentation as introduced in Chapter 1 and expanded upon in Chapters 3 and 4. Documentation is defined there as an open set, a dynamic system containing interrelated documents conveying the stories that represent an artwork. The elements of the set create knowledge by interacting with each other. The organisation of the documentation is rhizomatic and thus non-hierarchical. This last property is key for approaching the issue of the relationship between museums and artists. If the artwork is reconceptualised as a set of documents that carry the artwork's identity on equal footing, the artist's sanction becomes just one of the stories to take into account while interpreting the work and deciding on its possible futures. In order to be used in an informed way, this story needs to be analysed and juxtaposed with the others.

The principal function of the artist interview within this model is a documentary one: to foster the collection of information, or according to the terminology used in this dissertation, to gather stories that carry the artwork's identity. Following Rinehart's proposition that accumulation and excess are a means of securing the quality of representation, even methodologically unsuccessful interviews are significant. They incorporate into the documentation additional data which, by interacting with the rest, produce knowledge enabling an informed future 'use' of the artwork. For instance, in the case of *Untitled* (*Past, Present, Future*) an example of this would be the information related to the precision of the joints between the vinyl sheets. While according to

Hwie-Bing Kwee, during production on the first manifestation the artist valued a lack of precision (see. p. 171), in the interview, Kruger clearly expressed that the edges of the panels needed to match up perfectly. These two opposing statements can be additionally completed by the close-ups of digital images documenting this or other wall-wraps. The informed decision on how the next manifestation should be executed requires interaction between all three stories.

Simultaneously the artist interview may perform several other roles. Firstly, it guarantees the artist's presence in the artwork transformed into musealium. Prior to the transformation the authorship is unique and indisputable, but during the formation of the musealium through institutional processes, the museum acts as a co-creator. Thus, the artist interview may serve as a means to secure the original authorship. Moreover, within the framework of the same concept, it might create a space for negotiating the shape and content of the documentation. Secondly, following the assumption that the interaction between the documents in the set needs to be continuously fostered, the artist interview as a research method can function as a means to achieve this goal. Thirdly, the outcome from the interview can be used as a set of values – in this case, the artist's values – a filter through which this documentation can be read and interpreted.

Revisiting Kruger's statement quoted at the outset of this chapter, which presents the artist's attitude toward museums, when referring to the museum as a "staging ground for power" she was probably alluding to a different kind of power than the one the institution might exert over her artworks. However, in the context of the issues discussed in this chapter, the wish expressed in the last sentence of the quote came true. While passing through the art museum's apparatus, Kruger's work engendered considerable doubts and gave rise to several uncomfortable questions that allowed for a critical reflection on institutional *modus operandi*. Nevertheless, the museum is the site that makes this critical reflection possible in the first place.

Chapter 5

Artworks, Archives and Interviews: Reinventing institutional practices

> Behind every utopia there is always some great taxonomic design: a place for everything and everything in its place. [...] My problem with sorting orders is that they do not last; I have scarcely finished filing things before the filing system is obsolete. (Perec, 1997, p. 191)

> "It's all about the art object itself," the museum director said arguing that what we are currently doing with the Van Abbemuseum and its collection transgresses the rules of art. "I honestly don't think it is," I replied, "it's about the context at least as much, possibly more – and as museums we should give people a chance to make their own minds up." (Esche, 2009)

5.1   Introduction: Equalising the collection and the archive

The difficulties implicit in the institutional care of contemporary artworks result from an incompatibility between the organisation of today's museums and the requirements of contemporary art. Novel approaches developed in the field of contemporary art conservation, although often acknowledged among museum professionals, are rarely employed to their fullest potential. By studying institutional uses of the artist interview – one of the innovative tools developed to support conservation – previous chapters identified, exposed and examined several factors that stand in the way of implementing these 'new' methods and, in consequence, threaten the very continuity of collected works of art. The first factor is the number and extent of the organisational divisions stemming from the traditionally object-based structure of museums, and the related classificatory principles. The second is the character of the relationship between artists and museums. Building on the ideas presented throughout this book,

this chapter completes the construction of the theoretical model of the 'artwork-as-(an) archive', which is intended to help overcome these difficulties and adapt the existing museum structure to the needs of contemporary art. It starts with the description of practices employed by museums that have approached the same challenge for different purposes, but following similar conceptual underpinnings. The introduction of the theoretical model is supported with examples that point to potential practical solutions for its implementation in museums, as well as obstacles that need to be overcome for successful implementation. Finally, it summarises the findings related to the artist interview, and demonstrates how the artwork-as-an-archive model might boost the use and efficiency of interviewing in the museum.

As the empirical part of this study has demonstrated, a contemporary artwork is a potentially changeable entity that is distributed between art objects, processes, concepts and contexts, and is shaped by all of these factors throughout its whole career. Musealisation entails the transformation of the artwork into a self-representation and a set of documents, where art objects are understood as evidence on equal footing with other elements in the set. This condition implies that the comprehension and therefore perpetuation of an artwork rely on the equal consideration of all documents produced around it. Accordingly, this dissertation proposes that the documents that carry the artwork's identity need to be accessioned to and included in the museum collection on the same terms as art objects. After accession, documents become documentation, which should be dynamic in order to represent potentially changeable artworks, i.e. its components need to interact to create new knowledge that in turn contributes to the set. However, 'setting documentation in motion' requires both stimulus and infrastructure.

The observations made during the fieldwork proved that the notion of the artwork-related documentation, based on the Suzanne Briet's approach as introduced in Chapter 1 (see: p. 73), possesses certain features that might offer solutions in order to overcome the incompatibility between the object-based organisation of museums and the character of contemporary artistic production, and in consequence facilitate the task of safeguarding the continuation of contemporary artworks. The concept of artwork-related documentation recognises art objects as documents, and equalises them with other documents that carry the artwork's identity, and as such represent the artwork. It is thought of as an open-ended, dynamic system of interrelated documents

that create knowledge by interacting with each other. Its organisation is rhizomatic and therefore decentralised and non-hierarchical. Conceptualised in these terms, artwork-related documentation challenges the traditional classification principles of museums in two ways: firstly, by implicitly diminishing the privileged position of art objects within the museum's environment and placing them on equal terms with documents; and secondly, by elevating the importance of documents in relation to artworks. In museums, documentation is usually held in archives. The application of the concept of artwork-related documentation would position the two museum domains – the collection, which stands higher in the museum hierarchy, and the 'collection archive', which traditionally has an auxiliary function – at the same level of importance.[349] Is it feasible to implement this idea in museums that collect contemporary art? And if yes, how?

5.2   Merging Collection and Archive, Artworks and Documents: Radical institutional practices

Over the last decades several collecting institutions have addressed the discrepancy between the traditional object-centred structure of the museum and the character of contemporary artistic production. Some of them have responded to this challenge by revising the traditional separation of collection and archive, and the related classification principles. This section features two examples of institutional practices that meet these characteristics – that of the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) and the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven. Although the purposes behind this institutional, critical self-reconsideration are different than those that motivated this research, which is oriented towards preservation, its practical results might clarify, illustrate and expand my argument. Moreover, the purpose of emphasising similarities between

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349   In many art museums the 'collection archive' is still undervalued or even non-existent. In most museums the core of the artwork-related documentation focuses on registration and conservation (in the traditional sense of the word, see: Chapter 1, p. 76) and other documents. For example, flyers or videos that are produced for publicity and presentation are often regarded as being of secondary importance and stored outside of the collection archive proper. As such, for a long time these documents were not considered of great relevance for the perpetuation of an artwork, as in the case of the video recording of Danh Vo's lecture at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts presented in Chapter 3, p. 196. See also: Dekker, 2018.

innovative approaches to institutional contemporary-art collecting, as discussed in the curatorial and conservation fields, seeks to bring them into closer connection and encourage future collaboration.

In Europe, critical thinking about the structure of the art museum, and its possible obsolescence in relation to new art and experimental artistic practices, developed within the framework of New Institutionalism. In the arts, New Institutionalism relates to a series of curatorial, administrative and educational practices that emerged at the end of the 1990s mostly in medium-sized, publicly funded contemporary art institutions, and involved the reorganisation of their structures and a re-definition of activities (Kolb & Flückiger, 2013).[350] The term New Institutionalism was introduced by the curator and critic Jonas Ekeberg, for whom the main aim of this current, at least on a discursive level, involved catching up with contemporary art and the changing working methods of artists.[351] Novel practices were oriented towards de-emphasising the role of the exhibition in favour of fostering the production of artworks, promoting the participation of artists and artist collectives in institutional programmes, designing new approaches to mediation and education, and transforming institutions into discursive platforms for socio-political, economic and cultural issues oriented towards micro-publics (Preston, 2014, p. 183). New Institutionalism was a temporal phenomenon related to a certain discursive context within contemporary art institutions identified

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[350]   In the US, in the context of political science, economics, organisational behaviour and sociology, New Institutionalism (or neoinstitutionalism) is a methodological approach that explores how institutional structures, rules, norms, and cultures constrain the choices and actions of individuals when they are part of a political institution, see: Breuning, M., & Ishiyama, J. Neoinstitutionalism | social science. Retrieved from https://www.britannica.com/topic/neoinstitutionalism. However, the trend discussed in this section, despite having the same name, is a separate phenomenon that developed specifically among art institutions focused on art of the 20th and 21st centuries. The current of New Institutionalism in art institutions is discussed in depth in issue 21 of the journal Oncurating.org, see: Kolb, L., & Flückiger, G. (2013). (New) Institution(alism). *Oncurating.Org,* (21), 4–5. See also: Deiana, 2017; Doherty, 2004; Szreder, 2018.

[351]   Ekeberg coined the term New Institutionalism in the first issue of the publication series Verksted, published by the Office for Contemporary Art Norway in 2003. See: Ekeberg, J. (2003). New Institutionalism. Verksted, 1.

with particular curators, rather than a fixed alliance or movement.[352] Although its historical phase ended in the mid-2000s (Deiana, 2017), its influence still resonates in many contemporary art institutions, and the concepts and practices presented in this section are rooted within this current.[353]

The urge to critically reinvent contemporary art institutions as fostered within the framework of New Institutionalism found its continuation in the activities undertaken by the confederation *L'Internationale*.[354] This consortium of six public and semi-public European modern and contemporary art museums defines itself as a 'transinstitutional organisation' that, among other pursuits, promotes the shared use of collections and museum archives across its network. The concept of 'common heritage' fostered by the consortium is based on interconnected archives and collections, "challenging traditional notions of exclusiveness, closure and property" ("L'Internationale," n.d., unpaged). The consortium declares that art and its institutions have the power to question and challenge their own specific systems, such as the bureaucratic and self-referential structure, by experimenting with new protocols and developing more decentralised models ("L'Internationale," n.d.). The internal experiments around the idea of connecting the collection and the archive were carried out mainly by two members of the organisation – MACBA and the Van Abbemuseum. While the first works towards reinventing the registration and cataloguing system, the second uses display as its testing ground.

352 Consistently recurring names are Charles Esche (formerly Rooseum, Malmö, now Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven), Maria Lind (Kunstverein München), and Manuel Borja-Villel (formerly MACBA, Barcelona, now Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid), see: Deiana, 2017. Even the term New Institutionalism was opposed by the actors associated with it. Charles Esche chose to label his own practice as 'experimental institutionalism' while Jorge Ribalta, curator of the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA), called the novel practice tested in his institution as 'experiments in a new institutionality' (Kolb & Flückiger, 2013, pp. 8–9).

353 Curator and writer Simon Sheikh, in conversation with Lucie Kolb and Gabriel Flückiger, stated that New Institutionalism "spread like a bug all through the system and upwards in the system" (Kolb & Flückiger, 2013, p. 15).

354 L'Internationale brings together six major European art institutions: Moderna galerija (MG+MSUM, Ljubljana, Slovenia); Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (MNCARS, Madrid, Spain); Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA, Barcelona, Spain); Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen (M HKA, Antwerp, Belgium); SALT (Istanbul and Ankara, Turkey) and Van Abbemuseum (VAM, Eindhoven, the Netherlands). For more information about the consortium see: http://www.internationaleonline.org/confederation. The main actors that connect *L'Internationale* to New Institutionalism are Charles Esche and Manuel Borja-Villel.

At the turn of the millennium, the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) decided to address the growing interest in documentation in contemporary art and the need to embrace research within the scope of institutional activities by launching the Centre for Study and Documentation (CED).[355] Opened in 2007, the CED hosts and cares for the documentary material that constitutes the Archive and Library, and it is in charge of disseminating and activating the content of both. This dissemination entails enhancing the internal and external accessibility of the holdings and supporting research. The Archive and Library, which constitute the CED's core, act within the structure of the museum as a continuation of the MACBA Collection, and these three branches – Archive, Library and Collection – are conceptualised as 'Patrimonio MACBA' (MACBA heritage), formed by materials in a wide range of formats and supports. In the words of Mela Dávila Freire, the former director of MACBA Public Activities, the CED's collections "are not seen as subsidiary or secondary to the art collection; rather, they complement, expand and strengthen it, establishing ties, not of dependency, but of mutual bonding" (Dávila Freire, 2012, p. 200). According to Freire, this approach derives from the need to respond to the reduced importance of the end-products of artistic activity, namely art objects, and the need to shift the focus to relations between different actors involved in the creative process, as well as the creative process as such (Dávila Freire, 2012). This line of thinking led the museum to reject the conventional categories of 'artwork' and 'document', a separation that MACBA considers out-dated (Dávila Freire, 2011). To overcome this distinction in practice, the museum employed a structure that no longer differentiated between 'the artistic' and 'the archival', creating a single cataloguing method and system for both collection and archive.[356]

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355   On the English version of the MACBA website, as well as in the other English-language sources related to MACBA's policies, this unit is called the Study Center. However, for the purpose of this section I have decided to employ a direct translation of its original name (in Catalan: Centre d'Estudis i Documentació) as it reflects more precisely the actual scope of its activities.

356   Dávila Freire commented on additional, practical advantages of implementing a common system for collection and archive in the following way: "amongst other things, this fluid relationship avoids the need for endless, futile discussion aimed at ascertaining whether certain research collections are 'works' or 'documents'. Rather, it emphasises their hybrid nature, their combination of the two categories" (Dávila Freire, 2012, p. 199).

To understand what this radical gesture entails from the perspective of this research, it is important to introduce the CED Archive and its holdings. The Archive is divided into three categories: Documentary Collection, Personal Fonds and MACBA's Historical Fonds.[357] The first one consists of artists' publications, publicity material, posters and other such materials. The second one contains documentary material generated by activities of actors linked to contemporary artistic practice, who could be artists and artistic collectives, collectors, curators, etc. The third one, MACBA's Historical Fonds, holds the documentation generated by the museum in the course of its activities.[358] The common cataloguing method makes it possible to link information that is usually dispersed all over the institution in a common platform.[359] In practical terms this means that a search performed in MACBA's collection management system by the title or inventory number of a particular artwork from the collection will yield all related items (records), such as the main entry of the artwork, documentation of exhibitions organised by the museum where the artwork was presented, all public activities related to the artwork including talks and conferences, articles, books, videos showing the installation process, interviews with artists in the form of transcripts and/ or video recordings, and much more.[360] These records, which represent analogue or digital documents that are physically stored in various locations, create a virtual archive of the artwork. Simultaneously, the CED is the infrastructure for the systematic care of the archive, which stewards, replenishes and activates it by fostering research and providing accessibility.

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357   The use of the word 'fonds' stems from one of the basic principles of archival science called *Respect des fonds*. It means "to group, without mixing them with others, the archives (documents of every kind) created by or coming from an administration, establishment, person, or corporate body. This grouping is called the *fonds* of the archives of that administration, establishment or person" (Duchein, 1983, pp. 1–2).

358   The museum designed procedures and workflows that facilitate the gathering of the documents produced by museum departments at the end of each institutional activity. These documents feed the category 'MACBA's Historical Fonds'.

359   The common cataloguing system for collection and archive employed by MACBA is the MuseumPlus collection management system. In consequence, the archival material was catalogued according to standards for musealia, which is different than those used for the archives.

360   The complexities of the system employed by MACBA were explained to me by CED employees Noemí Mases Blanch, Paloma Gueilburt and Elisabet Rodríguez in a series of personal conversations carried out during my research residency at MACBA in October/ November 2018.

How does the structure introduced by MACBA differ from the traditional cataloguing systems used in museums? The difference lies in the way the information is structured and the scope of interaction between the documents. Usually the information about artworks is stored in collection management systems (CMS, see: Chapter 1, p. 67), such as the one used by Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam (see: Chapter 4, p. 239). In most of the collection management systems used in museums today, documents related to the artworks, such as certificates of authenticity, instructions provided by the artist, lists of equipment necessary for displaying the piece, exhibition publications or conservation reports, can be attached to the artwork's record.[361] However, file size and permitted formats are usually restricted. The structure of information about the artwork in the CMS is thus fixed and linear: the entry for a particular artwork contains limited information that has been assigned to it. Documents that define the artwork are predetermined – one can add new ones or delete the existing ones, but the scope of the information that defines the artwork is constrained. By contrast, the system implemented by MACBA makes it possible to access documents that, although only indirectly related to the artwork, nevertheless provide data that are significant for its comprehension. Let's take as an example a list of fifty artworks featured in one exhibition. In a traditionally structured CMS this list would need to be attached to the record of every artwork separately. In MACBA's system this list is catalogued independently and appears in the search related to each of the listed artworks. An example of a document that defines the artwork is the recording of Danh Vo's public talk at MoMA (see: Chapter 3, p. 182), which, despite being created for reasons other than documenting the artwork collected by the museum, includes key information for a proper understanding of the work. In the traditional system this document, produced by employees responsible for public events who are not involved in collection care, would not be attached or linked to the CMS record of the artwork. At MACBA this kind of documents are separate archival entities that appear while searching by the name of the artist, title of the artwork or inventory number of the latter. Thanks to

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361 The sole record of each musealium, depending of the complexity of the system, already includes a wealth of information. The template for CMS records at Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam includes categories such as identification/production, physical characteristics, iconography, inscription/marks, associations, numbers/relationships, documentation, reproductions, condition/conservation, value, acquisition, disposal, ownership history, location, exhibitions and loans.

the structure, which treats artworks and archival material equally, MACBA's system allows for a deeper contextualisation of artworks and increases the possibility of constructing alternative narratives.

From the perspective of this research, so far the structure built by MACBA still presents several weak points, the most notable of which is related to the scope of the information comprised. The CED Archive does not encompass all the documentary material generated and kept within the museum. The archive of the collection department (or 'area' in MACBA's terms), which includes for instance artists' installation instructions and the majority of conservation-related documents, remains separate, and access to the information it contains is restricted. Furthermore, as there is not a system for archiving correspondence, the museum does not collect emails exchanged between stakeholders involved in the acquisition and/or presentation of an artwork, another aspect identified in this study as important for understanding processes behind the shaping of the musealium (see: Chapter 2). Nevertheless, the MACBA team has acknowledged these gaps as important to address within a series of challenges to take on in the long-term process of reinventing the institution. Experience and the potential of existing infrastructure built through the years offer a space to address these challenges methodologically.

Another member of *L'internationale* that experiments with the traditional museal classification systems and bridging the taxonomic separation of artworks and documents is the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven. Over last decade, the Van Abbemuseum has been at the forefront of critical thinking on what an art museum is, and how, for whom and with whom it (co)operates. This theoretical assessment is based on everyday museum practice that actively investigates how a museum can make stories with exhibitions, collections and archives that speak not just about the art itself or its societal frameworks, but interfere in these frameworks and their associated power structures (Lerm Hayes, 2015). In 2004 the museum started to test new ways to work with institutional resources – not only the collection, but also the archive and the library (Bishop, 2013).[362] In line with the theoretical underpinnings of

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362   In 2004 the directorship of the museum was taken over by Charles Esche, one of the key actors of New Institutionalism.

MACBA's practices, the idea behind the novel approaches of the Van Abbemuseum was to look at and use the museum's collection as a whole without making distinctions between the artwork and the "paperwork around the artwork" (Esche, Franssen, & Aikens, 2012, p. 5). Museum research curator Steven ten Thije argues that this shift was necessary because art changed following the logic of the ready-made, and is now produced by installing things without as much attention to the quality of the "thing itself" (ten Thije, Andrews, & Cánepa Luna, 2013, p. 11). Hence, the strong similarity between "the artwork itself and a sort of collection or archive" (ten Thije et al., 2013), serves to blur the boundaries between traditional categories of collection and archive. However, while at MACBA the merging of categories was tested 'behind the scenes', at the Van Abbemuseum the main space of experimentation is the display. The Van Abbemuseum is not the only or the first art institution to bring archival material into the exhibition space, but they did it in an unorthodox way by elevating documents to the same level of importance as the artworks from the collection.[363] In the series of research exhibitions called Living Archive, copies of the archival material were shown on the walls together with the artworks. Contracts and letters exchanged between artists and successive directors told stories about the circumstances of the acquisition, whereas other sources, such as reports or press clippings, contextualised the artwork within broader discourses.[364] For example, Paul McCarthy's 1987 video Family Tyranny/ Cultural Soup, in which the artist speaks in a grotesque way about a violent father-son relationship, is shown alongside documents presenting US child-abuse statistics, as well as discourses espoused by conservative groups instrumentalising the concept of 'family values' for political purposes (Franssen, Broos, & Cox, 2008). This approach shifted the emphasis away from the artist, his oeuvre and his place in the canon, to the

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363   For more details related to the novel approaches of Van Abbemuseum see: Franssen, D. (February 2018). The Archival Turn in Van Abbemuseum. Presented at the seminar The *Boundary Condition: About the Archive and its Limits*, Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA). Retrieved from: https://www.macba.cat/en/the-boundary-condition-discussion-with-mela-davila-and-diana-franssen

364   The series of exhibitions 'Living Archive' curated by Diana Franssen was organised at Van Abbemuseum between 2005 and 2009. The most interesting episode of the series is *Mixed messages* (14/04/2008–14/09/2008), in which pieces from the museum collection were displayed alongside documentation. This combination permitted a reassessment of the artworks' significance as the outcome of social, political and economic factors. "Mixed messages can be considered a reconstruction, disassociating itself from the autonomy of art as something quite separate from the existing order" (Fletcher, Thije, Franssen, Esche, & Niemann, 2009, p. 99).

biography of the artwork and the context in which it was created and functioned, or, in other words, to change from one universal, linear art historical narrative to various site-specific and context-specific micro-stories (Esche, 2017; Esche et al., 2012). The relativity of the categories of artwork and document was also addressed in the latest display of the collection, which opened in 2017. In this show, the reproductions of the archival material, such as photographic documentation of past exhibitions, were hand-painted onto canvas, transforming them into artworks, while the artworks themselves were shown via exhibition copies, thus transforming them into documents.[365]

Although the practices employed by both museums to bridge the gap between the categories of artwork and document stem from different purposes than those that have shaped this study, they do follow similar conceptual underpinnings. Both examples illustrate a gradual recognition a of the weakening barrier between objects and documents, collections and archives, along with the relativity of both categories in the framework of contemporary artistic practice. Building on the notion of 'artwork-related documentation' and the concept of anarchives as introduced in Chapter 1 (see. p. 59), and applying a conservation-oriented perspective, the next section presents a theoretical solution to the same challenge posed by the reconceptualization of a collectible as an anarchive.

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365   Exhibition *The Making of Modern Art* (29/04/2017–03/01/2021) curated by Christiane Berndes, Charles Esche, Steven ten Thije, in collaboration with the Museum of American Art, Berlin. For more information see: https://vanabbemuseum.nl/en/programme/programme/the-making-of-modern-art/ and Athanasiadis, E. The Making of Modern Art: Thinking Outside the Box. Retrieved from https://vuartandculture.com/2017/06/27/the-making-of-modern-art-thinking-outside-the-box/

5.3   The Museum Collection as a Collection of (An)archives

Unlike the archive, the collection as a concept has been inscribed in the notion of the museum since its origins. Today the collection continues to occupy a central position in the museum, and its particular status is legally supported.[366] Therefore, to make these two museum domains – collection and archive – equal, I propose to merge them within the conceptual framework of the collection. For this purpose I will adopt and expand on the notion of 'artwork-as-an-archive' introduced by conservation theorist Hanna Hölling (2013a, 2015, 2018). Hölling's concept encompasses both a physical and a virtual sphere of an artwork, where the former contains "all documents, leftovers and tangible materials produced by the artwork" and the latter "entails tacit knowledge, skills, and memory of everyone involved in the process of shaping the work" (Hölling, 2015, p. 86). This combining of the physical and the conceptual under one umbrella concept is similar to the notion of "artwork-related documentation" that I have put forward in this book. The parallel continues with Hölling's affirmation that the archive determines the nature of artworks, i.e. that the decisions that influence the future embodiment of artworks are made on the basis of the archive (Hölling, 2015). Given that subsequent manifestations of an artwork produced on the basis of the archive in turn enter the archive and transform it, the archive evolves as a dynamic entity directed towards the future shape of the artwork (Hölling, 2015). This theoretical construct embraces the artwork's possibility for and the inevitability of change and re-defines the conservator's role as that of "maintaining the artwork's identity through the interpretation and actualisation of the archive" (Hölling, 2013). Although Hölling's concept was proposed principally in the context of media art, in my

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366   Currently, there are multiple parallel, on-going discussions among museum professionals around the very notion of the museum, its definition and its expansion to embrace non-collecting institutions. In 2019 ICOM launched the Museum Definition Initiative to collect proposals for a new definition of museum from organisation members. See: *Museum Definition – ICOM.* (2019). Retrieved from https://icom.museum/en/activities/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/. My own standpoint follows the definition by theoretical museologist Peter van Mensch for whom a museum is "a permanent museological institution, which preserves collections of 'physical documents' and generates knowledge about them" (Van Mensch, 1992 quoted in Desvallées & Mairesse, 2010, p. 58). For the legal underpinnings of museum collections' special status see: e.g. Warren, J. (Ed.). (1996). The Legal Status of Museum Collections in the United Kingdom. London: Museums & Galleries Commission. Retrieved from http://www.sanhs.org/Documents/LegalStatusofMuseumCollections.pdf

view it is also relevant to contemporary art regarded as the paradigm of artistic practice (see Chapter 1, p. 36).[367] The combination of these two concepts – the artwork-related documentation and the artwork seen as an archive – leads to the re-conceptualisation of the museum collection as a collection of archives. However, expanding the notion of 'artwork-related documentation' to 'artwork-as-an-archive' requires the inclusion of a critical reflexion on the structure the archive, as introduced following Zielinski's notion of anarchives described in Chapter 1 (see: p. 78).

The conceptualisation of the artwork as an '(an)archive' supports the open-ended character of contemporary artworks as well as their intrinsic incompleteness, partiality and fragmentation. Similarly, the archive will always be lacking or can always be added to. According to Jacques Derrida's vision of the archive, as the gaps and absences are integral to its identity and also difficult to prove, they might also be seen as a form of evidence (Derrida & Prenowitz, 1995, see: Chapter 1, p. 77). Therefore, within the archival space, there is no threat of over-documenting. On the contrary, as Rinehart (Rinehart & Ippolito, 2014) has observed, collecting as many stories as possible increases the accuracy of the artwork's representation (see: Chapter 4, p. 222).

To suggest, as this thesis does, that a museologised contemporary artwork might be conceptualised as an (an)archive is to view it as an open-ended set with a rhizomatic structure and a dynamic system containing interrelated documents (tokens) that represent an artwork. Particular elements of the archive create knowledge by interacting with each other, and this interaction is activated by means of research. Why then might the model of artwork-as-(an)archive facilitate conservation and decision making regarding the artwork's future shape? On a conceptual level, the artwork-as-(an)archive grants the possibility of collecting and caring for contemporary artworks beyond their material embodiment. Gathering together the evidence of an artwork's conception, as well as the knowledge produced around it during its 'life', makes it possible to represent its multi-levelled, complex nature. Although the archive's own limitations prevent it from fully representing the artwork, the accumulation of documentation allows gaps to be identified and addressed, and, more importantly, makes it possible to foster relations

367   Hölling (2013) acknowledged the possibility of using the concept of artwork-as-an-archive for other categories of art.

between individual elements of the set. The artwork-as-(an)archive is a common source of information about the artwork that facilitates equal access to and distribution of information, and prevents the exercise of authority based on the appropriation of knowledge. This non-hierarchical (un)structure offers space for flexibility and (some) creativity in shaping the artwork-as-(an)archive on a case-by-case basis.

Yet, there are still questions that need to be answered regarding the practical implications of the model of the artwork-as-(an)archive and why its application might help institutions to safeguard the continuation of contemporary artworks from their collections. Firstly, the artwork-as-(an)archive model offers the possibility of switching from a single governing narrative of what the artwork is and does, to various micro-stories that foster alternative interpretations and broaden possibilities concerning the artwork's future shape.

Secondly, it helps shift the concept of conservation within the museum from a set of object-oriented actions to a collaborative effort encompassing the whole institution. In the framework of the artwork-as-(an)archive model, a musealised artwork ceases to consist only of art objects in order to embrace documents gathered and produced by the artwork's stakeholders. In turn, the artwork's continuation relies not only on conservators but also, and explicitly, on other institutional actors. The artwork-as-(an)archive model emphasises the contribution to and responsibility for the perpetuation of an artwork as the common task of a long list of figures: curators and educators who collect, produce and promote interpretations; archivists and registrars who gather and organise knowledge produced within the institution; librarians who take care of information produced outside the museum walls; photographers and audio-visual technicians who document and install artworks in galleries; event coordinators responsible for producing and staging the artworks, etc. The emphasis on conservation as a common task might help to overcome the divisions between different organisational domains, thereby making it a more attainable reality. Moreover, the artwork seen as an (an)archive can become a space for collaboration that encourages all stakeholders to take an active part in conserving the artworks collected.

Thirdly, the model pushes museums to reconsider the act of acquisition as more than just purchasing art objects, and extending it to the production and gathering of documentation within the process, and consequently , to having this reflected in the acquisition budget.[368] From this perspective, without collecting the stories that carry the artwork's identity, the acquisition would not be considered complete.

Fourthly, it fosters a need to build an infrastructure to facilitate collecting understood as documenting, and to create a space for documents to interact with each other as a network. And finally, it helps to embrace the complementation and activation of the archive through research within the framework of collection care and locates it at the same level of priorities as the-state-of-art hi-tech storage that hosts the art objects. Hence, it supports the recognition of research as a full-fledged conservation tool for safeguarding the artwork's continuation while respecting its changeability.

How would the application of the artwork-as-(an)archive model facilitate the collection and conservation of the specific artworks studied in this book? Although any answer to this question is mere speculation, it may serve to illustrate my proposal and assess its validity. Starting with Danh Vo's 'Chandeliers project', regarding it as as an archive might allow the project as a whole to be collected, without focusing on a specific artefact. Although particular chandeliers would still be owned by separate museums, the institutions could gather the documents that relate to all of them, showing the commonalities and differences in the way the artist assembles them on display, together with contextual information illuminating the artist's choices. The creation of this sort of documentation could be a common effort of all three institutions, and as such a factor fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange, a possibility that will be discussed later on in this chapter. Looking at Kruger's *Untitled* (*Past, Present, Future*) as an archive could encourage the museum to gather documents that are essential for understanding the artwork's nature starting from the point the institution decided to acquire it. Furthermore, it would foster the systematic documentation of the consecutive manifestations of the piece, including the way the artist progressively

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368   In this regard the Guggenheim Museum in NY set a precedent by, according to Rinehart and Ippolito (2014, p. 273), earmarking about 15 per cent of the acquisition budget for its 2002 Internet art commissions for an endowment meant to fund future re-creations of the works.

adapted it to the architectural context. And finally, it might provide a space to mediate with the artist as to the institution's future usage of the artwork, and, already at the time of acquisition, to have discussed its possible futures. The advantage of the archive as a site for negotiation is that it provides the necessary contextual information and references that need to be taken into account. In both cases the application of the artwork-as-(an)archive model would foster collaboration between museums and artists, as well as the systematic documentation of this collaboration, and would empower museums to employ the artist interview regularly, not only as a method for documenting but also as a tool for collecting contemporary artworks.

Despite having different *raisons d'être*, the experiments of MACBA and Van Abbemuseum and the artwork-as-(an)archive model featured in this dissertation overlap in several ways. Concepts and practices rooted in New Institutionalism developed as a response to the artistic strategies of contemporary art, changing relations between museums and society at large, and coming to understand art not as a 'thing in itself', but as existing in dialogue with the social sphere (Aikens, Lange, Seijdel, & Thije, 2016). As such, they invite users to think critically and allow them to construct their own narratives around the artworks collected. Although the artwork-as-(an)archive model was introduced not as a means to reinvent art institutions but as a strategy for securing artworks' continuation, it shares conceptual underpinnings with practices introduced here. Similarly to the cataloguing and display practices of MACBA and Van Abbemuseum, the reconceptualisation of the artwork as an (an) archive allows us to reconsider traditional museum classification principles and work towards the accessibility, transparency and activation of museum holdings. It opens up the institutional space to a multiplicity of perspectives and dialogue by rejecting a single governing narrative.

Instead of dictating what the artwork is, what it does and how it should be perpetuated, it offers space for collecting and producing diverse, often competing micro-stories. Moreover, the model of artwork-as-(an)archive complies with *L'Internationale*'s interest in establishing a new, more proactive relationship between museums and the societies that host them. The artwork seen as an (an)archive constitutes a space for collaboration, allowing the public to take part in securing the continuation of contemporary artistic production within the institutional framework, an idea that will be developed later on

in this chapter. Emphasising the commonalities between the concerns discussed and examined in the curatorial field, such as those of *L'Internationale*, and the conservation-oriented issues presented in this book, might foster collaboration between these two areas on developing theoretical frameworks to make the institutional collecting and safeguarding of contemporary art more efficient and democratic. The artwork-as-(an) archive model could be the missing link between these two spheres, and the trigger for critical institutional practices like those of MACBA and Van Abbemuseum to take into account conservation, which at present has largely been left out of their approach.

5.4   Setting up the Archive: Creating space for collaboration

To function in the museum, the artwork-as-(an)archive model requires an infrastructure that supports the production, management and activation of the documentation collected. The contemporary conceptualisation of the archive as developed in the writings of philosophers such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Giorgio Agamben emphasises the importance of the archive's infrastructure by suggesting that the archive stands for both the entirety of what can be expressed and documented, as well as all of the technologies that support the archive's media (Zielinski et al., 2014). For Derrida, the methods for transmitting information shape the knowledge that is produced in the archive, or in other words the structure of the archive determines what can actually be archived (Derrida & Prenowitz, 1995). This is especially true of digital archives, where documents and contents are inextricably intertwined with the system of production, storage and organisation (Dekker, 2017). As media art historian Ina Blom has observed, "once the archive is based on networked data circulation, its emphatic form dissolves into the coding and protocol layer, into electronic circuits or data flow" (Lundemo, Røssaak, & Blom, 2016, p. 12). Following this line of thought, and drawing on the traditional structure of the museum archive, this section provides examples of existing, even established solutions which resemble the artwork-as-(an) archive model. As such, they might help to comprehend the advantages of the model's structure and suggest how the artwork-as-(an)archive model might be set up in the institutional setting.

The basic unit for organising the institutional documentation of musealia is the 'object file' or 'object dossier'. *The Handbook for Museums* defines it as a "careful listing of all actions or activities impacting a particular object in the museum's collections including all conservation, restoration, exhibition, loan or other uses of the object" (Edson & Dean, 1994, p. 292). The concept of 'object file' is rooted in the pre-digital regime of documentation and therefore is primarily thought of as an assembly of different types of physical documents brought together in one cardboard folder.[369] It can hold textual documents both structured (e.g. forms) and unstructured (e.g. reports, letters, handwritten notes). It may also contain photocopies of texts from exhibition catalogues or articles, legal documents such as bills and invoices, as well as photographs. Sometimes the 'object file' can consist of more than just paper documents, such as the fabric sample in the case of Bałka's *211x170x125, 190x129x73* from the Kröller-Müller Museum collection (see: Chapter 2 p. 93). In the case of traditional analogue archives, the format of the cardboard folder may be seen as a potential limitation on what can enter the archive.[370]

This book's concept of artwork seen as an archive is akin to the 'object file', since both gather documents taking the artwork as a classification principle, provide a space for assembling these documents together, and make them interact with each other. In various case studies presented here, the 'object file' was the entry point for the investigation of a musealised artwork; however, in each of the institutions examined this folder is organised differently. In some, like Tate and Centre Pompidou, it has a well-established structure, while in others, like the Kröller-Müller Museum, it is more

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369   The guidelines of Sustainable Collections Projects of Central NSW advise on setting up an object file as follows: "The object file can be any type of folder. You can anchor the pages at the top left hand corner with a brass paper fastener or spike, available from stationary shops or newsagents. Alternatively plastic sleeves help keep the information in order. If keeping original material such as historic photos or an instruction book on the file, always put it in a secure pocket or sleeve" (Winkworth, 2009, p. 1).

370   This is not always the case. Some museum archives might also be repositories of leftovers, spare parts, exhibition copies, etc., for example the conservation archive of ZKM (Zentrum für Kunst und Medien, Karlsruhe) as described by Hölling (2013, p. 223). However, the inclusion of objects in the collection-related archive that do not fit in the pre-established archiving format might result in limited access to these 'oversized' documents. Because of their physical properties they need to be stored separately, for example in storage where the access is regulated by restrictive procedures.

of a compilation of all documents assessed as important by various museum employees involved in collection care. In both cases, the character of the information comprised in the object file is different from the data held in collection management systems, where data are entered by filling in pre-established forms (Barok et al., 2019).

Although the cardboard folder with paper documents is still a predominant system of gathering documentation about artworks collected in art museums, some institutions have already switched to digital technologies. The transition from purely analogue to entirely digital is a long process that museums need to divide into various intermediate stages. Currently, many institutions simultaneously gather and store documentation in analogue and digital form.[371] While 'printable' documents are stored in paper form, non-printable ones like audio files are kept in digital files on the internal museum server.[372] Some institutions, such as the SMA, have decided to employ solutions that allow them to manage, store and efficiently access all digital documents (see: Chapter 4, p. 240).

It is actually the digital infrastructure that allows the artwork-as-(an)archive theoretical model to be implemented in the museum setting. It affords an unprecedented capacity for accumulating information and for this information to network and to be mobilised for user inquires. Moreover, the digital archive promotes the accessibility and democratisation of its content. Although the starting point and inspiration for the artwork-as-(an)archive model proposed in this dissertation is the analogue 'object file', the potential for interaction between documents is fully unleashed in '360°' – the digital document management system used at the SMA (see: Chapter 4, p. 175). From the organisational point of view, the 'Objectdossier' (360°'s digital equivalent of the 'object file') resembles a non-hierarchical anarchival structure. It has no categories and therefore all kinds of digital documents associated with the artwork might be deposited

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371   This is the case of Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, where, as of 2017, most of the documentation produced in the pre-digital era is still kept in analogue format. The majority of the documents stored in 360° were created after the implementation of the document management system.

372   In some institutions analogue systems for organising information have led to situations in which digital-born information, such as emails, need to be printed out in order to be archived.

there directly and hyperlinked to one to another.[373] One of the elements that transforms this set from a passive accumulation of data into the "living documentation" described by Briet (Briet, 2006, p. 41; C. Macdonald, 2009) is its powerful search engine, which renders information accessible through combinations of keywords.[374] As with most of the technologies available today, 360° has its shortcomings, such as limitations on file size and lack of support for a number of file formats. From a long-term preservation perspective, the fact that it runs on commercial technology constitutes a serious disadvantage.[375] Moreover, many employees do not find the system to be user-friendly or intuitive.[376] However, the logic of unstructured storage of information embedded in a wide variety of different documents searchable by keywords illustrates the intended organisation of the artwork-as-(an)archive model.

Another noteworthy tool for creating digital archives of contemporary artworks in an institutional setting that is currently being discussed and tested in the framework of contemporary art collection care is MediaWiki, the publishing software developed for Wikipedia.[377] One of the institutions pioneering experimentation with this tool is SFMOMA, which started to use MediaWiki to document their complex media installations. A testing ground for MediaWiki as a documentation platform was Julia Scher's multi-channel video and sound installation *Predictive Engineering* (1993–present) (Barok et al., 2019), which since 1993 has been redesigned together with the artist for three distinct locations in the evolving museum.[378] In order to maintain the concept of the work, the installation setup and media have been

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373   Through hyperlinking it is also possible to circumvent the only category imposed by the archive, namely the particular artwork, by connecting information on various artworks, for instance those made by a single artist.

374   Briet's approach to documentation is explained in detail in Chapter 1 (see: p. 73).

375   In the field of digital preservation, technologies based on open-source software are preferred over those based on software developed for commercial purposes, see: e.g. Dekker, 2010.

376   Personal conversations with SMA employees carried out during the fieldwork conducted between February and June 2017.

377   For more information about MediaWiki see: https://www.mediawiki.org/wiki/MediaWiki.

378   The documentation and re-installation of Julia Scher's Predictive Engineering was part of SFMOMA's project "The Artist Initiative" (see: Chapter 1, p. 59). For detailed information about the artwork's history and the project related to documenting it, see: https://www.sfmoma.org/julia-scher-predictive-engineering/

updated for each iteration to stay abreast of the latest developments in surveillance technology (Barok et al., 2019). The artwork's MediaWiki page features curatorial texts, installation instructions, equipment lists, descriptions of previous iterations, audio and video interviews, press reviews, correspondence, etc.[379] This assemblage aims to document the artwork and secure its future installations by bringing together curatorial, conservation and technical perspectives. As SFMOMA Media Conservator Martina Haidvogl has observed, given that Predictive Engineering does not exist anymore after being deinstalled, its MediaWiki archive might stand in for the artwork while it is not on view (Clark, Haidvogl, Frieling, & Scher, 2017). What differentiates the structure of the MediaWiki page from 360°'s 'Objectdossier' is the existence of a predominant (though collectively written) narrative, the need for an editor, the reliance on categories, and the need to employ these categories in order to access the files linked to the wiki.[380] Although MediaWiki maintains files in a flat hierarchy, which means that each one is on the same level of importance as any other wiki page, access to these files is embedded in the internal structure of the page's menu.[381] Still, the system is flexible and supports collaboration – it is configurable and adaptable to the circumstances or the artwork and comes with version-tracking functions. The latter, together with a built-in system for referencing (Barok et al., 2019), make it possible to understand how the content was shaped, who shaped it, and where the entered information comes from. The collaboration also includes the artist – besides the fact that the content was shaped in collaboration with the artist under the aegis of the 'Artist Initiative' project, the structure of the template was also altered according to the artist's particular vocabulary. The subsequent manifestations of Predictive Engineering are documented on sub-pages entitled 'episodes' (as the artist prefers to call them) instead of 'iterations' (as established in the basic template) (Barok et

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379   As of today, the content of SFMOMA's MediaWiki platform is not available online. This description is based on the research conducted by NACCA researchers Dušan Barok and Maria TeodorakI at SFMOMA, as well as online sources (see: e.g. https://blog.wikimedia.org/2016/07/07/sfmoma-mediawiki/?fbclid=IwAR3YLd_A-3-sYoVwF06siVZ6gZZaMFiuG0L5vAxS5OJrX-KtmZEj6g1rPZg). Recently a summary of Barok's investigation has been published in Studies in Conservation, see: Barok et al., 2019.

380   The basic page template of SFMOMA's MediaWiki is divided into the following categories: curatorial description, technical narrative, components, exhibitions, installation, iterations, manual and hardware information, and references (Barok et al., 2019).

381   The insights into the structure of MediaWiki were provided by Dušan Barok in a series of personal conversations carried out between 2018 and 2019.

al., 2019). To conclude: whereas its organisation goes against the non-hierarchical anarchival structure of the artwork-as-(an)archive model, SFMOMA's MediaWiki is another example of a collaborative archive built across departmental divisions and in partnership with the artist.

Returning to MACBA, their conceptual abolishment of the division between artworks and documents, described in the previous section, led to the development of further practical solutions. Following the drive to disseminate what the museum termed 'Patrimonio MACBA' (see: p. 283), the institution is currently developing an online repository, designed as an infrastructure for the preservation, management and dissemination of digital assets that will provide broad access to its resources.[382] The repository is based on the logic of cataloguing described before and therefore covers both the collection and the archive.[383] Also, as in the collection management system, its structure allows records from both domains to be cross-linked. The repository is also envisioned as a collaborative space, since the content is produced by many participants; however, similarly to the SFMOMA's MediaWiki, it requires a manager who assigns records to particular categories. As of November 2018, the repository was accessible to all museum employees on their desk computers as well as to external researchers through computers located in the museum library.[384]

It is important to point out that all of the examples of the infrastructure for organising information in artwork archives described in the foregoing sections – the cardboard 'object file', SMA's 360°, SFMOMA's MediaWiki and MACBA's Centre for Study and Documentation and repository – originate at institutions where the collection

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382   For more information about the repository see: *Repositori Digital MACBA*. Retrieved from
       https://www.macba.cat/en/library#tab-38926

383   Contrary to its conceptual underpinnings, the structure of the repository renders this
       division visible. The two main categories (called "communities") in the repository are "Fons
       artístic", which contains entries related to the works from the MACBA collection, and "Fons
       documental", which includes material from the CED Archive and Library.

384   MACBA is planning to provide online access to the repository in the coming months. As of
       December 2018, the team responsible for the repository was discussing the establishment of
       different levels of accessibility to each specific type of content. The system provides controlled
       access with credentials for viewing and downloading restricted content, such as copyrighted
       videos or information regarding loans and collaborations with other bodies and institutions.

and the archive are, nevertheless, still separate domains.[385] The artwork-as-(an)archive model's proposed total erasure of this division, by considering art objects as documents, implies re-conceptualising museum storage as another institutional micro-archive. Given that the artwork-as-(an)archive model is conceived as virtual and adjusted to the affordances of digital environments, the physical art objects held by the museum can be included in it via digital representations, for example photographs, videos, 3D scans, etc. However, this inclusion is more difficult if an artwork is distributed between different institutions, as in the case of Danh Vo's 'Chandeliers Project' (see: Chapter 3). Each system presented in previous sections follows the logic of centralisation, where all the information is gathered together in one physical or virtual space. However, this is not the only way an archive could be organised in the digital era.

Ideally, the 'Chandeliers Project' seen as an archive would be an interinstitutional one, where the information created by a particular museum would remain under the custody of this institution, but at the same time be present in the archives of the other museums (see: Chapter 3, p. 212).[386] This approach is akin to post-custodial archive theory, which proposes institutions be re-positioned from custodians of archival records to stewards or managers of records that are located elsewhere (Kelleher, 2017). The post-custodial archive paradigm stands in opposition to the traditional theory and practice of archiving based on physical custody of records, and recognises that information is not always contingent on its physical form. It is rooted in the establishment of collaborative relationships and the drive to overcome the notions of ownership and exclusiveness in relation to the broadly defined notion of heritage.[387] However, to make the archive interinstitutional, the documents need to be accessible and the institutions must be open to collaboration, which, as the next section demonstrates, is not always the case.

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385   Although at MACBA this division was conceptually abolished, it still governs the organisation of the institution.

386   A similar idea is expressed through Rinehart and Ippolito's concept of 'Interarchive'. The initial postulations of the International Network for the Conservation of Contemporary Art (INCCA) also resemble this model (see: Intoduction, p. 11).

387   The concept of a post-custodial era in archiving was coined by archivist and theorist F. Gerald Ham, see: Ham, F. G. (1981). Archival Strategies for the Post-Custodial Era. The American Archivist, 44(3), 207–216. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.44.3.6228121p01m8k376

5.5   <u>Accessing the Archive: Sharing its content</u>

The issue of accessibility challenges both key concepts discussed in this dissertation – the artist interview and the model of artwork-as-(an)archive. While the definition of the artist interview informed by oral history theory as proposed in Chapter 1 (p. 61) assumes that the outcome of the interview is transformed into a stable, accessible source, my experience conducting fieldwork has shown that this is often not the case. Research as the way to activate the archive stands at the core of the artwork-as-(an)archive model, and the availability of all stories that enter the archive conditions its purpose. Given that access to the overall documentation produced around collected artworks is often controlled and restricted, in order to implement the artwork-as-(an)archive model, and, as I argue, to secure the perpetuation of contemporary artworks in an institutional setting, all documents related to artworks from the collection hosted within the museum must be made accessible to as many potential users as possible.[388]

Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, Tate, like all public institutions in the UK, has the obligation to provide access to all the information it holds.[389] Although an impressive amount of data is already shared with the public on the museum's website, the majority of the documentation on the collection's artworks is kept in and managed by Tate Archive and accessible to researchers in the Tate Britain Library Reading Room upon request. The procedure is standardised, and it takes up to 20 days to respond to the application. Tate states on its website that the aforementioned Freedom

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388   This is a challenging endeavour, especially because it often goes against current legislation. However, as the example from Tate presented later on in this section demonstrates, there are solutions to effectively limit access to bits of legally protected information such as personal data. The experiments with bringing the documentation to the exhibition space led by Van Abbemuseum proves that the disclosure of archival information is not only possible but also efficient as a curatorial strategy. The issue of public access to documentation held by museums is discussed by various conservation theorists, especially in the context of media art, see: e.g. Wharton, 2015, as well as the concept of Open Museum fostered by Rinehart and Ippolito (2014).

389   See: Freedom of information, Tate website, retrieved from: http://www.tate.org.uk/about/who-we-are/freedom-of-information; and also Freedom of Information Act 2000, retrieved from: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/36/contents.

of Information Act sets out a series of exemptions.[390] How does the application of exemptions affect the accessibility of the artwork-related documentation? Before the consultation, the requested documents (such as object files, which consists of 'Acquisition Files' and 'Conservation Files'), are examined by an employee of the Library, Archive or Public Records in order to detect potentially sensitive data. Employees from the Conservation Department often inspect the Conservation File prior to release.[391] Documents containing information that is deemed confidential are photocopied, and the questionable sentences or paragraphs redacted. The numeric code of the applicable exemption is provided on each 'censored' page.

Blacked-out portions appear throughout the files consulted at Tate for the research we have seen on works by Mirosław Bałka (see: Chapter 2, p. 141). Often it was easy to guess what type of information the redacted text contained, and in most cases the redacting appeared to be appropriate.[392] In other instances though, for unclear reasons the 'censorship' affected documents directly related to the artwork and essential for its understanding. A note in the condition report of one of the works investigated states that the artist provided "very precise and eloquent installation instructions".[393] Also, the table of contents on the cover of the Conservation File mentions an 'Installation File'. However, the indicated page contained only the following statement: "9 pieces [pages] have been removed from this file. Closed under Freedom of Information Act. Exemption: s31".[394] During the time period in question it was common for Bałka to

390   "If an exemption does apply, the public authority must state exactly which exemption it is applying to withhold information and explain clearly, and with reference to the information, why that particular exemption is relevant". (Freedom of Information Act 2000, retrieved from: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/36/contents)

391   Information obtained from a former Tate employee in a conversation during the fieldwork conducted at the museum in January 2017.

392   For example personal data. In most of the museums the price paid for the artwork in the acquisition process as well as the value of the work is considered confidential information as well. However, it does not necessarily need to be confidential, as Van Abbemuseum's "Museum Index" project proved. As a part of the exhibition "The Collection Now" (02/11/2013–17/12/2017), the museum displayed a graphic overview of works from the collection in relation to their value. See: https://vanabbemuseum.nl/en/programme/programme/museum-index/.

393   Laurenson P., Sculpture Conservation Preliminary Condition Report, 16 January 1995, Conservation File T06960, Tate Archive, London.

394   "Exemption S(2)31: Law enforcement", see: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/36/section/31

provide handwritten instructions accompanied by detailed drawings.[395] Why was this information classified? Were the handwritten notes in imperfect English simply too challenging for the reviewer to decipher and assess?

External researchers' ability to consult documentation related to the artworks from the collection varies from institution to institution and the policy of accessibility is rarely transparent, but rather is applied on a case-by-case basis.[396] US museums are less keen to provide access to documents that are considered internal than European public institutions, which are legally obliged to do so.[397] However, even in European public museums the practices vary and, due to infrastructure differences, are rather difficult to compare. For instance, in many institutions documentation generated for conservation purposes is categorised as confidential and stored separately from the object files kept in the collection archive.[398] However, the category of conservation-related documentation is not a fixed one – the artist interview is labelled as such in some institutions but not in others. The Van Abbemuseum, which does not have a conservation department,

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395   See: e.g. instructions provided by Bałka for 211x170x125, 190x129x73 (1993) from the Kröller-Müller Museum collection (see: Chapter 2, p. 121 and also Figure 22).

396   By researcher I mean every person interested in studying the artwork. However, it is also important to mention that it is much easier to apply for access to museum documentation for researchers with documented institutional affiliation (preferably university affiliation) than for a simple art lover.

397   During the research carried out at MoMA (see: Chapter 3, p. 198) I was allowed to consult only a small part of the existing documentation. My request for more information on what types of documents are included in the classified section was rejected by the employee at the Study Center.

398   The notion of confidentiality in relation to conservation is still debated among conservators. Whereas some conservators feel that the condition and treatment reports should be classified, others promote the idea that free exchange of information serves the preservation of artworks, and therefore access to these types of records should never be denied. Even though laws around confidentiality are straightforward, perceptions of the issue within the profession are not. For a more detailed account, see: Stavroudis, C., Brandow, W., & Kruth, L. (1986). Confidentiality of Records: Perceptions and Reality. WAAC Newsletter, 8(2), 1–4. Retrieved from https://cool.conservation-us.org/waac/wn/wn08/wn08-2/wn08-202.html. For a reflection on the relative absence of discussions about this issue in the context of contemporary art, see: Learner, T. (2008). The object in transition. A Cross-Disciplinary Conference on the Preservation and Study of Modern and Contemporary Art. *CeROArt*, 2, 6–10. Retrieved from http://ceroart. revues.org/425. An example of separating conservation-related documentation from the rest of artwork-related documentation is SMA's 360°, which does not include reports produced in the conservation department. For a more detailed description of documentation practices at SMA, see: Chapter 4, p. 240.

declares that artist interviews, which are a part of their standard workflow, are intended only for internal purposes and are therefore not accessible to external users.[399] At MACBA, artist interviews are from the outset conducted with public accessibility in mind, and are often shared on the museum website in an edited version.[400] One of the limitations for establishing norms of accessibility is the absence of rules determining which documents enter the collection archive and which do not. To be able to use the archive one needs to learn its logic, structure and functionality (Hölling, 2018), which are often not clear even internally. Furthermore, access to the documents produced around the artworks from the collection is often restricted not only for outsiders, but also for museum personnel. In some museums the conservation archive is off-limits to curators and vice versa. For example, at Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, the conservation-related documentation is not included in 360° and is difficult to access, even internally. These constraints are also visible in the way institutions conceptualise their infrastructure for collecting artwork-related documentation, which is generally designed exclusively for internal use without providing public access.[401]

5.6   The Artist Interview as an Interpretative Tool for the Artwork-as-an-Archive: Reassessing the ideal

Chapter 1 featured the 'model' artist interview, informed by oral history theory and the thoughts of various practitioners from the field of conservation, my own experience included (see: Chapter 1, p. 61). The artist interview was framed there as an oral, semi-structured, guided conversation with an artist concerning a specific artwork from the museum collection. Its purpose is to identify and document the features of a contemporary artwork that have been indicated as key to the artwork's understanding,

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399   Interview with Van Abbemuseum Head of Collections (C. Berndes, in-person interview, November 21, 2018).

400   Interview with MACBA Head of Conservation (Silvia Noguer, personal communication, 29 October 2018]. *Fons de documentació audiovisual* (Audiovisual Documentation Collection) is a documentary series in which artists who are part of the MACBA Collection talk about their work, see: e.g. *Interview with Antoni Miralda*, Retrieved from https://www.macba.cat/en/video-fons-miralda-holy-food.

401   Besides the MACBA on-line repository (see: p. 299), all solutions described in the previous sections are developed for internal use only.

namely conceptuality, contextuality, processuality and media variability as sanctioned by the artist. In line with an oral history perspective and because of the method's multi-levelled subjectivity, the artist interview as a source is seen more as an assemblage of stories than as an accumulation of facts. In the course of the research this ideal artist interview has been tested against various case studies conducted in different institutional settings. What, then, are the conclusions of this examination?

The artist interview is an efficient method for documenting the constellation of meanings that are essential for grasping the multidimensionality of a contemporary artwork. It is a valuable documentary source as well as an important reference for decisions on the possible futures of institutionally collected artworks. It is also a valid source of artist's sanctions – direct or indirect indications of how the work should be displayed, used and cared for (see: Chapter 2, p. 108). And yet, the interview as a source is contingent on multiple conditions, such as the accuracy of the preparatory research, the character of the relationship between the artist and the institution, or the development of the rapport between the interviewer and interviewee. Moreover, it might prove ambiguous at the time of the consultation, which implies the necessity to interpret the information it contains.[402] For the informed management of an artwork's continuation, the artist interview needs to be combined and juxtaposed with additional sources, presenting the perspective of the artist but also of the other stakeholders involved in the artwork's career.[403] Various statements by the same artist, including those expressed in interviews, may provide different, often competing information. Therefore, although it often yields unique, in-depth insights into the artwork's nature authorised by its creator, the interview is not more valid for understanding, interpretation and decision making than other documents with information that allows one to grasp the artwork's nature. Following these observations, of which the majority

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402   Most of the observations described in this paragraph confirm the remarks and recommendations from existing literature on the subject. See: e.g. Beerkens et al., 2012; Stigter, 2009, 2011.

403   The introduction to *The Artist Interview For Conservation and Presentation of Contemporary Art: Guidelines and Practice* (see: Chapter 1, p. 47) mentions that "information from the interview can also be tested against other sources if there are doubts about material-technical or other factual information" (Beerkens et al., 2012, p. 15). This dissertation proposes to replace 'can' with 'must', as consulting other sources is necessary not only for verifying factual information, but also for understanding the artist's opinions and perspectives. In my view juxtaposition and comparison with other sources is key to an informed use of the interview as a source.

have already been acknowledged in the field of contemporary art conservation, I propose that the issues related to using the artist interview in the museum, traced throughout this dissertation, are not intrinsic to the method but caused by the context in which it is used, namely the museum as such.

The ideal artist interview proposed in Chapter 1 is rarely employed in day-to-day museum practice. Chapter 4 indicates two causes of this condition (see: p. 272). Firstly, in the museum the artist interview pertains to the domain of documentation, which is seen as subordinate to that of the collection, and as such is not considered a priority when allocating institutional resources. Secondly, the relationship between museums and artists is often not based on partnership but rather relies on both parties' often-conflicting interests and sense of authority. This dissertation offers two solutions that might enhance the institutional use and effectiveness of the artist interview, both as a method and as a source. The first one is the reconceptualisation of the interview's outcome, from a source of factual information to an assemblage of stories, and the second is the framework of the artwork-as-(an)archive model as developed throughout this book.

According to current values, principles and laws governing the field of heritage and visual art, including conservation, artists largely retain their authority over musealised artworks.[404] Therefore, although the relativity, contingency and subjectivity of the interview as a source has been broadly acknowledged in the field of conservation,

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[404] The call for the artist's will to be respected appears in many professional regulations, such as the Code of Ethics provided by the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, which states: "All actions of the conservation professional must be governed by an informed respect for the cultural property, its unique character and significance, and the people or person who created it" (AIC 1994). The artist's authority over his or her work is also expressed in legal regulations. In most European countries artists retain a continuing non-propertied interest in their works even after they have consigned them to others. This *droit moral* specifies that the artists or their heirs have the right to stop artworks from being mishandled or subjected to ridicule, for example being hung upside down or displayed in demeaning conditions (Zolberg, 1992). The Visual Artists Rights Act is a US federal law adopted in 1990 that protects the moral rights of artists. Moral rights include the right to attribution and the right to integrity. These rights legally guarantee an artist's association with a work he or she has created, and protects that work from modification which could tarnish the artist's reputation (Sheesley, 2007).

the reliability and even truthfulness of the artist's account has been perceived by many as a problem at the time of conservation decision making (Davies & Heuman, 2004; Sommermeyer, 2011; Stigter, 2004; van Saaze, 2009a).[405] The proposed re-conceptualisation of the interview's outcome – from source of factual information to assemblage of stories – enhances the critical distance from what the artist has actually said in the interview. The difference between facts and stories is akin to the distinction between testimony and narrative in the framework of oral history, where testimony is the account of events seen and witnessed, and a narrative is a story about oneself in relationship to these events (Portelli, 2018). From a practical perspective, this re-conceptualisation is an important reminder of the fact that the interview is a source for the artwork's custodians to interpret as they build their arguments, and never a set of instructions for them to follow at face value. It offers a sound framework for questioning, if necessary, the artist's opinion or will. Furthermore, discussing stories rather than facts allows us to set aside such issues as contradicting or competing artist's statements or the factual reliability of the narrative.

Since working with oral history interviews means operating on many different levels (Portelli, 2018), the call to use the artist interview to collect stories does not diminish the importance of the facts embedded in the stories. Interviews will be examined in the future as a source of facts to reconstruct the events of the past, for example by historians, biographers, etc. However, these facts need to be seen through the lens of cultural dependencies, that is, as connected to the narratives and the cultural and linguistic constructs generated around them (Portelli, 2018). Finally, if the task of interviewing is understood as collecting stories related to the conceptual dimension of the artwork, the artist interview ceases to be an auxiliary method and becomes a conservation tool in its own right. It makes it possible to actually preserve the artwork by providing information about its processuality, conceptuality, media-variability and contextuality – key features for the understanding of a contemporary artwork's nature that, if left unrecorded, might be lost to future publics.

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405   See also: Umpelby, S. Determining the artist's intent in order to be able to conserve modern and contemporary art, SSCR Journal 14(1), 2003 pp. 16–17.

The artwork-as-(an)archive model advocates for conceptualising the documentary sources that carry an artwork's identity, including interviews, as stories. Its non-hierarchical (un)structure allows for all the stories to be considered equally, regardless of their origin. Furthermore, since in the model's framework the production and gathering of documentation through research is an integral part of the process of collecting, the artist interview as a research tool becomes an essential part of the acquisition process. Such an understanding might lead museums to implement interviewing on a daily basis, since without the interview the musealium (the artwork-as-an-archive) might be incomplete.

Situating the artist interview on equal footing with other documents gathered in the archive leads us back to the question posed in Chapter 1 (p. 84) and actualised through the expansion of the theoretical model, which addressed the function of the artist interview within the artwork understood as an archive. In her writings on the "artwork meaning archive," Hölling observes that one of the consequences of this concept is the relativisation of the weight of the artist's intentionality (Hölling, 2013, 2015). The archive makes space for securing the presence of other actors involved in the artwork's career – an essential condition for obtaining a comprehensive representation of its nature. Granted that in particular cases these other voices may overshadow the voice of the creator, within the artwork seen as an archive the artist interview as defined in Chapter 1 allows the primary authorship to be secured. The interview also offers institutions the possibility of inviting the artist to take an active part in the formation of the artwork-as-an-archive – to mediate its shape by forming its content and jointly identifying remaining gaps. The concept of artwork as a 'living', dynamic and constantly changing archive supports the standpoint expressed often in the related literature that the artist interview should be seen not as a one-time event, but rather as a series of episodes (Stigter, 2012b). Furthermore, given that the interaction between the documents in the archive needs to be continuously fostered, the artist interview as a research method can function as a means to achieve this goal. Lastly, the interview presents a set of artist's values that can be used as a filter through which the archive can be analysed and studied. As such, the outcome of the artist interview might be seen as a guide for the methodological assessment of information comprised in the archive, and for future uses of the stories gathered there – as an interpretative tool and a 'key' to the artwork understood as an archive (Wielocha, 2017).

5.7   Applying the Archive: Challenges and further implications

As the previous sections argue, one of the major challenges in applying the artwork-as-(an)archive model in a museum is the issue of accessibility and the scope of the institution's willingness to disclose documents. Accessibility depends on institutional policies, legal regulations, existing unspoken rules, social agreements, and, most importantly, on the will, motivation and interest of the museums themselves. However, granting access to institutional documentation and sharing it with others means relinquishing power and giving up some authority over the collected artwork. The artwork-as-(an)archive model is a tool for critical inquiry that makes it possible to confront notions of exclusiveness, closure and property traditionally related to museums. Its application would eventually give rise to questions about what it means to own an artwork whose nature lies in documents that, in the digital era, are not unique but reproducible, easily accessible and can even be cloned and distributed among different institutions. The artwork/archive model enables in-depth exploration of the difference between having and holding, or possessing and safekeeping, and opens up the possibility for institutional collecting to distance itself from the regime of the art market.[406] However, the crucial question of whether museums are ready or inclined to take on this challenge remains a possible direction for further research.

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406   T*o Have and to Hold* is the title of an article in which influential curators from two major modern and contemporary art museums – Frances Morris, then Head of Collections at Tate, and Manuel Borja-Villel, director of Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía – discuss the way the collection is conceptualised at their institutions. See: Borja-Villel, M., & Morris, F. (2013). To Have and to Hold. T*he Exhibitionist*, (8), 6–17.

Chapter 6

Conclusions: Turning artworks into archives

Summary of Problems

In contemporary art the boundary between artworks and documents is growing increasingly blurry, as these two categories merge from both directions. On the one hand, as Van Abbemuseum curator Christiane Berndes points out, a great deal of performance documentation that has entered museums in various ways, whether as photographs or videotape, over time has taken on the status of 'the work' itself (Westerman & Giannachi, 2018). On the other hand, the physical objects acquired by museums often deteriorate or cease to function, leaving behind documentation that can substitute or represent the work.

This dissertation argues that to secure the continuation of contemporary artworks, museums need to address this ambiguity of categories and revise the corresponding practices by considering documentation as an 'object of conservation' that is equally important as the art objects collected. The documentation of a contemporary artwork carries a large part of its identity, and acts as evidence of its potential changeability. As such, it needs to be dynamic and, in Susan Briet's (2006) terms, 'inter-documentary'. This implies contextual reliance and, in consequence, the formation of a network of documents that interact with each other. However, a stimulus is needed in order to nourish the set and boost the degree of networking, which can be achieved by means of research. The perpetuation of contemporary artworks therefore requires research to be included in the scope of conservation-related activities, and conservation within the museum to be reconceptualised as a transdisciplinary, trans-departmental, common obligation of those who contribute to documentation.

As for documentation, two recurring issues in the field of contemporary art conservation are how to involve other stakeholders in conservation, and how to apply research as a method (Hummelen & Sillé, 2005; Laurenson, 2006; Scholte & Wharton, 2011; Wharton, 2009). However, there are various impediments that hinder the implementation of these ideas in museum practice, two of which have been identified in this dissertation. The first is the object-oriented character of art institutions, which persist in following classification principles and practices that contradict the characteristics of contemporary art. The second site of tension is the complicated relationship between artists and museums, shaped by multifarious historical and cultural factors and by the parties' often divergent interests. The way these two factors impede the implementation and effective use of novel contemporary-art conservation approaches has been scrutinized here by examining how the artist interview, a research method and a central knowledge-production tool in contemporary art documentation practices, is employed in museum practice.

Unlike other memory institutions like libraries and archives, museums were from the outset designed as collectors of objects. Whereas over the last century the concept of heritage has undergone important changes to include intangible forms of expression, the organisation and practices of museums, especially those collecting art, have remained by and large object-based. Even though, as this research has demonstrated, the identity of contemporary artworks is distributed between objects and documents, museums do not consider these two categories as equally important. While the art objects enter the collection – the museum's core – the documents are deposited in the archive, which traditionally fulfils a mere auxiliary function. The practices related to collecting and collection care are prioritised accordingly. Upon acquisition, art objects need to be crated, insured, shipped, registered, catalogued, checked, and stored in appropriate conditions. In comparison, the effort and resources allocated in the production and care of documentation are usually significantly smaller. Insufficient time and lack of funds were indicated by various participants in this study as one of the main reasons for museums' limited use of artist interviews.

Whereas the history of the relationship between living artists and the museums collecting their work is not directly addressed in this book, the entangled character of this bond is clearly visible between its lines. Although it remains in the background of the research, its influence on the practices employed by the museums studied is clearly observable. The artist interview, as a method established to document the artwork's career and the artist's opinions on the way the future of her or his work might unfold, presumes that artists will be interested in collaborating with institutions towards securing their work's continuity. However, this is not always the case. Often, the interests and visions of the artists and museums clash, and the collecting procedures applied by today's institutions tend to leave little space for mediation. The artist interview, defined in this dissertation in line with oral history theory, is a time-consuming undertaking whose outcome is contingent on wide-ranging circumstances, such as the thoroughness of the preliminary research or the development of rapport between the interviewer and interviewee. Moreover, the source produced frequently does not provide straightforward answers to conservation-related queries, but instead requires interpretation and additional research. Finally, if the interview results in sanctions that limit an artwork's use or hinder its continuation, the predominant authority of artists over their work limits the possibilities for negotiation.

In instances in which consulting with the artist in the allocated time frame is unfeasible, researchers can opt to shift their focus towards other sources of artists' statements, remarks and stories, both primary and secondary, related to the collected artwork. This research has shown that although the artist interview has multiple advantages both as an investigative method and as an outcome, other documents might be equally important for understanding an artwork's complexity and in consequence for steering its possible futures. However, many of these documents, such as letters or emails exchanged between artists and curators, correspondence with the producer of an exhibition featuring the artwork, or recordings of public artist talks and interviews, are not considered by museums as relevant for conservation, and are stored in unstable, semi-private archives, if they are kept at all. This observation leads back to the object-oriented organisation of museums, which entails dividing museum staff and practices between those who are involved in the conservation of the artworks collected, and those who are not.

Consequently, as this dissertation suggests, practical and theoretical developments from the field of contemporary art conservation have yet to be fully implemented by museums, and safeguarding contemporary artworks continues to pose a challenge for their institutional keepers. The causes of this situation are, among others, museums' object-based organisation, and their adherence to a notion of conservation that does not match up with the actual needs of contemporary works of art. This manifests itself in the obsolete categories of artworks and artwork-related documents and, in turn, in the division between collection and archive.

Towards a Solution

Drawing on critiques of the museum which assert that decontextualisation is inherent to musealisation, this dissertation argues that upon crossing the threshold of a museum the contemporary artwork transforms into documents that represent it. Because this transformation is de facto and automatic, my proposal is ultimately not to treat art as documents, but to recognise that this conversion already takes place, and to adjust institutional practices accordingly. Applying Briet's perspective on the nature of documents, art objects, too, can be seen as documents that are equally important as other documents in the set. Therefore, the musealised contemporary artwork is a set of documents of the same provenance, and as such resembles an archive.

The concept of artworks as archives was introduced in the field of contemporary art conservation by conservation theory scholar Hanna Hölling (2013a, 2015, 2018). While Hölling states that each media artwork is an archive, I propose to reconceptualise all musealised contemporary artworks as archives, and to include these archives in museum collections. This entails the conceptual transformation of institutional collections of objects into collections of archives. This dissertation takes Hölling's concept as a starting point and expands it by elaborating on the internal organisation of the archive and the possibilities of implementing it in today's museums.

The structure of the artwork seen as an archive follows the logic of Briet's 'dynamism of living documentation', which consists of networks of documents that create knowledge by interacting with each other through juxtaposition, overlapping and

complementing. Its organisation is rhizomatic – open-ended, decentralized and with non-hierarchical, multiple entry and exit points. To emphasise the lack of fixed classification and categorisation within the archive, I have adopted the notion of 'anarchives' as introduced by media theorist Siegfried Zielinski. The unstructured nature of 'anarchives' respects the specificity of the documents' original order or lack thereof, as well as the intrinsic incompleteness, partiality and fragmentation of the archive. Instead of promoting 'the one and only story', 'anarchives' contain numerous micro-narratives. The model of artwork-as-an-(an)archive benefits from the capacities of digital technologies such as databases. The model is founded on the principle of accumulation and, in particular, on the perspective of media art theorist Richard Rinehart, who has argued that collecting as many records as possible increases the accuracy of an artwork's representation (Rinehart & Ippolito, 2014).

The artwork-as-(an)archive model is supported in this dissertation by examples of practices tested in today's museums that to a certain extent resemble the model, share similar theoretical underpinnings, or suggest ways in which it could implemented. The examples provided indicate that there are significant conditions which need to be fulfilled in order to use the artwork-as-(an)archive model in institutions, including not only infrastructure but also the institution's willingness to provide access to documentation. The cases discussed have brought to light further advantages of the artwork-as-(an)archive model, such as its potential capacity to increase the public understanding of and involvement in institutional collecting and contemporary art in general.

I propose that the implementation of the artwork-as-(an)archive model as a principle for institutional contemporary-art collecting could make it possible overcome the two factors that have been identified as keeping novel approaches developed in the field of contemporary art conservation from taking root in museums, and thus facilitate the institutional care of contemporary artworks. The artwork-as-(an)archive model confronts the object-oriented character of art institutions' classification and care practices in three different ways. Firstly, it supports the expansion of the acquisition process to include, besides the purchase of art objects, the production and gathering of documentation. In other words, an acquisition would be considered incomplete unless it assembles artwork-related documentation. Secondly, it fosters the inclusion of

documentation within the scope of collection care, and accordingly calls for research into the nature of an artwork to be understood as conservation-related activity. Thirdly, it shifts the concept of conservation within the museum from a set of object-oriented actions to a collaborative effort of the whole institution, and a common obligation shared by all those who contribute to the archive.

In this dissertation the artwork seen as an archive is thought of as a space for collaboration between artists and museums, a space to be collectively shaped, filled and nourished. This collaboration, whether successful, failed, thorny or non-existent, will leave its trace in the archive, securing the presence of the artwork's creator and, consequently, its original authorship. Within the artwork-as-(an)archive model all documents are accorded equal value, be they records of artists' statements, conservation reports or production invoices. Referring to these records as 'stories' instead of 'documents', as this dissertation proposes, emphasises their subjective nature and the need for interpretation. Equalising the archive's multiplicity of stories, and underlining subjectivity as their inherent feature, enhances a critical distance with respect to the artist's views and wishes, and offers a foundation for mediating and even for questioning the artist's opinion, if necessary.

Within the artwork-as-(an)archive model the artist interview can take on a variety of functions. Firstly, the interview is a method for collaboration within the space of the archive, and thus for negotiating the shape and scope of the latter. Secondly, as a research method, it enhances the mutual interaction among the archive's records. Thirdly, because the artwork-as-(an)archive model encourages practitioners to reconceptualise how interviewing can be used to gather stories on artworks' conceptual dimension, it eventually transforms the artist interview from an auxiliary method into a conservation tool in its own right. Finally, the artist interview as a source might serve as a key to the archive – an interpretative tool or filter through which the archive can be read.

Original Contribution

The novelty of my approach within the field of contemporary art conservation is that it is built around a definition of contemporary art, and therefore specifies its actual subject of inquiry. While most of the doctoral dissertations related to contemporary art conservation conducted during the last decade have focused on a certain artistic format, medium or genre – software-based art (Ensom, 2019), digital art (García Morales, 2010), net art (Dekker, 2014), time-based or media art (Hölling, 2013), installation art (Jadzinska, 2010; van Saaze, 2009a), performance art (Marçal, 2018), photography (Marchesi, 2017); conceptual art (Stigter, 2016); temporary art (Kromholz, 2016) – this one aims to depart from this classification in order to provide a more general view on the subject.[407] This approach is grounded in the conviction that overcoming these divisions, both within the field of contemporary art conservation as well as within collecting institutions, might benefit the further development of methods for safeguarding contemporary artworks. This dissertation contributes to the field of contemporary art conservation by further exploring the interrelation between oral history theory and the artist interview, analysing the role of the artist interview within the institutional framework and providing a critical perspective on its actual use. Furthermore, by emphasising their common goals, it establishes a link between new approaches to museum-based contemporary art conservation and the curatorial drive to reinvent art institutions.

My main contribution, however, is the artwork-as-(an) archive model – a transdisciplinary, theoretical framework for holistic, institutional care of contemporary artworks that supports the adaptation of the traditional organisation of art museums to the specific needs of contemporary art. Besides facilitating conservation, the artwork-as-(an) archive model fosters transparency, collaboration and inclusion, and in consequence the democratisation of contemporary art and its institutions.

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[407]   There are other recent doctoral dissertations that offer a more general approach to the conservation of contemporary art, beyond tackling a specific 'kind of art', e.g.: Gordon, 2011; Macedo, 2008; Fiske, 2004.

Where to Next? Implications of the study and recommendations for further research

This project opens up a number of aspects that could be pursued in further research by triggering a variety of questions, such as what it means to conserve an artwork understood as an archive, and how this shift in condition might affect the role of the conservator. As Hölling has observed (2013), in this context the notion of conservation extends to the management, interpretation and upkeep of the archive. In other words, the continuous modification of the archive might be seen as a method for conserving potentially changeable contemporary artworks. However, viewing the artwork as a transparent, accessible and collaborative archive could stand at odds with the authority not only of the institution, but also the conservator. In the framework of the artwork-as-(an)archive model, the latter ceases to be a lonely guardian of the artwork's integrity, but one actor among many in what expert media art scholar Annet Dekker has termed (in the context of net-art preservation) as "networks of care", which consist of providers of knowledge from a variety of fields and backgrounds (Dekker, 2018). The role of the conservator within these networks may vary from leader to moderator or mediator, which is an issue left to be explored by future researchers.[408]

The reconceptualisation of the artwork as an archive converts it into a collaborative space for various stakeholders from both inside and outside the museum. Besides bridging internal institutional divisions, the artwork-as-(an)archive model might also be employed as a method for fostering external partnerships, for example through the application of the post-custodial archival paradigm. Another way to use the artwork-as-(an)archive model in an outward direction is by opening it up to the public, by not only making it accessible in 'viewer mode' but also inviting the public to actively collaborate. The artwork-as-(an)archive model may be seen as a way to democratise

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408   The idea of the conservator as a mediator has long been discussed in the field of conservation: as mediator between the artist and art history (Stigter, 2004), mediator of artist intention (van Saaze, 2009a), or mediator between the artwork's stakeholders (Wielocha, 2018). For more about the role of conservators as advocates, mediators and/or sources of expertise, see: Avrami, Mason, & de la Torre, 2000. This section speaks about the potential role of the conservator as a mediator within the 'networks of care' – that is between different participants in the artwork's care, which could be institutions, private citizens, communities, etc.

artworks in public collections – a space where the audience can contribute to the artwork and take an active part in shaping its future. As such, it might enable new ways of understanding, appreciating and using museum collections. Furthermore, it might also offer the possibility of experimenting with participative conservation.[409] As Rinehart and Ippolito (2014) have noted, the involvement of amateur 'unreliable archivists', although not easy to accept for conservation professionals, is necessary for certain kinds of contemporary art production, for instance software-based art. This path was also signposted by Glenn Wharton who, in the context of media-art, envisioned the concept of crowd documentation or even crowd conservation (Wharton, 2015b). Further exploration of the use of the artwork-as-(an)archive model as a tool for enhancing collaborative conservation is another interesting path to pursue.

The unique features of digital archiving raise the temptation, reflected in the construction of the artwork-as-(an)archive model, to collect and archive everything, just in case. However, as computer scientist Serge Abiteboul (2018) has remarked, by attempting to collect and archive everything, one could fall into the trap of Funes the Memorious, from the eponymous story by Jorge Luis Borges, who remembers everything but understands nothing. "The act of abstracting is a form of forgetting – we must forget some details to gain insight into the broader world around us. And herein lies the existential problem of digital memory – the choice of what to forget" (Abiteboul, 2018, p. 226). This observation points to another problem that calls for additional research – what are the advantages and drawbacks of accumulation as a method for preservation?

Lastly, the artwork-as-(an)archive model, although elaborated theoretically, needs to be investigated further and examined against museums' day-to-day reality. As this dissertation has indicated, there are several museums that are already experimenting

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409   Challenges related to recording and documenting the public reception of contemporary artworks have recently been explored by many scholars and practitioners, especially in the context of performance art and interactive media artworks, see e.g.: Kwastek, 2018; Muller, 2008. At present, there is a clear tendency to promote participatory decision-making processes in conservation, especially in the context of ethnographic objects, public art and installations. Essential for studying this issue is the work of Miriam Clavir (2002) and Glenn Wharton (2008).

with some of the issues that this model supports, such as merging the collection and the archive. Perhaps some of these institutions would be interested in advancing these experimentations by embracing conservation-related challenges.

Limitations of the Research, Critical Stance and Final Remarks

Although the case-based approach and the use of ethnographic methods proved to be suitable for studying institutions and institutional conservation, their application and therefore the results of this study have important limitations that need to be acknowledged. This dissertation does not provide a complete picture of the condition of contemporary artworks in institutional collections, nor does it reflect the whole spectrum of how artist interviews are used in this context. The number of museums studied is highly restricted, and all of them are located in Europe and the US. The artworks investigated were created by artists working in the Global North.[410] Furthermore, the lack of standardisation of museums' structures and procedures, together with the inevitable diversity of the artworks studied, render certain comparisons and conclusions debatable. Finally, the field of contemporary art conservation as well as related institutional practices are currently in transition (van Saaze, 2009c), and therefore are constantly developing at a rapid pace. This research spanned over three years and, although from the perspective of theoretical advances this does not seem like a long time, during this short period practice has already evolved significantly. These limitations, however, open the opportunity to scale and expand this research to further investigations.

By way of conclusion, I would emphasise that our future understanding of contemporary artworks can only be constructed through traces of documentation. Documentation constitutes an artwork's potential to be reborn; in other words, the future fate of a contemporary artwork is to be enacted out of the documentation surrounding it. This book offers a model which grants artwork-related documentation a status equal to that of art objects, and obliges institutions to care for it on a similar basis. Furthermore, the artwork as an archive, a 'repository of subjectivities', provides a space for the animated

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410   With the exception of Danh Vo, born in Vietnam, but raised and educated in Denmark. For a discussion of whether Vo can be considered a Vietnamese artist see: Taylor, 2012.

documentation to produce future knowledge about today's art, and invites artists and potentially also the public to participate in actively shaping it.[411] As a treasury of ideas, it provides a foundation for their new uses.

Today's contemporary art museums, often accused of being too traditional to embrace contemporary art practices, while at the same time criticised as overly elitist and catering only to a highly educated and therefore privileged public, will need to reinvent themselves on many different levels – a process that some institutions have already embarked upon. In my view, by encouraging a critical self-reflection on the museum's modes of working, protocols, and hierarchies, considering the artwork as an archive may lend support to this overarching process. Although the model offered in this dissertation was conceived as a way to respond to the conservation-related needs of contemporary art, it might also inspire progressive thinking about its dissemination. Artwork as an archive is thought of as a tool for both internal and external collaboration: across institutional departments, with artists, and with publics, and as such it fosters the opening-up and democratisation of institutions by sharing with their users basic responsibilities such as conservation. Given the structure, organisation and legal circumstances of today's museums, the artwork-as-(an)archive model may appear to be a radical, utopian construct that is difficult if not impossible to apply. However, even if it cannot be implemented from one day to the next, it can be incorporated into the museum's fabric gradually, along the lines of the Van Abbemuseum's examination of their institutional practices: with a two steps forward, one step back approach, carefully and creatively testing each of its impacts before fully integrating it into the museum's policies.[412] From the specific vantage of conservation, this dissertation has attempted to help get institutions to start taking bold (albeit faltering) steps along this path.

411   The term 'repository of subjectivities' was borrowed from Sara Diamond who uses it in relation to museums in Ascott, Diamond, Lovink, & van Mourik Broekman, 2000.

412   Christiane Berndes, Curator and Head of Collections at the Van Abbemuseum, describes institutional experiments related to merging the collection and archive as an approach akin to artistic practice where, instead of solving problems, questions are addressed in multiple ways by putting together exhibitions. Berndes explains that the Van Abbemuseum was often too hasty in applying concepts that often proved incomprehensible to the public: "We realise we are taking steps too quickly and the response of our visitors was, 'Yes, but we want to also have the chance to really experience the artwork'. Then we applied two steps forward one steps back approach, and instead of putting the documents next to the artworks we would put them in vitrines" (C. Berndes, in-person interview, November 21, 2018).

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Ludwig Museum Cologne Archives, Cologne, Germany

Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona Study Centre Archives, Barcelona, Spain

Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw Archives, Warsaw, Poland

Statens Museum for Kunst Archives, Copenhagen, Denmark

Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam Archives, Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Tate Archives, London, UK

The Joseph and Sylvia Slifka Painting and Sculpture Study Center, Museum of Modern Art, New York, US

Van Abbemuseum Archives, Eindhoven, the Netherlands

Summary

Collecting Archives of Objects and Stories:
On the lives and futures of contemporary art at the museum

Conventionally, twentieth and twentieth-first century art challenge traditional principles of conservation. In the 1980s modern and contemporary art conservation emerged as specific field to tackle the modern materials and new technologies embraced by 20th-century artists. Although technical materials-oriented research is still an important part of the field, since the beginning of the 21st century the focus has shifted towards the works' immaterial features. Conventionally, visual artworks have been perceived as fixed, unique, material entities created and finished at a particular time, and traditional conservation theories were established accordingly. Nevertheless, art produced during the last decades, especially contemporary art, has often resisted these tenets, undermining conservation dogmas such as material authenticity, artist intent, reversibility, minimal intervention, and the conviction that an object's integrity resides in its physical features. This discrepancy and its practical impacts have pushed scholars and practitioners to seek out concepts and tools supporting an effective approach to this 'new' art, resulting in a new theoretical frameworks, models, tools and approaches. However, part of the problem in implementing such novel solutions within the museum is that, in a sense, contemporary art poses a challenge to one of the principal duties of the institution: to preserve.

This doctoral dissertation focuses on this gap between the fast-developing theory of contemporary art conservation and the rigidness of institutional practice. Its vantage point is the triangle of mutual relationships between artist, a museum, and a contemporary artwork as collectible, investigating how contemporary artworks are collected, documented and conserved in today's institutions. Through research on collaborations between contemporary art institutions and artists, with a special focus on the artist interview, it looks at how (and if) new methods developed in the field of contemporary art conservation are incorporated by museums, and attempts to identify factors undermining their effectiveness. The study aims to offer a solution that respects

the central position of the collection for the museum, while also posing more profound questions about the nature of contemporary artworks in relation to traditional museum structures. By tracing the discrepancies between these two notions, it works toward a theoretical model that might help to bridge them.

Chapter 1, "Contemporary Art, the Artist Interview, Documentation and Conservation: Establishment of terms and survey of practices", defines four key concepts – contemporary art, artist interview, documentation, conservation – whose definitions are grounded in the literature of art history and theory, curatorial studies, conservation, oral history and archival studies. Two of these terms – the artist interview and documentation – are put forth as 'model' concepts, raising questions concerning the relationship between them. While in the non-hierarchical model of artwork-related documentation all elements hold equal status, they may still have different functions. Moreover, if the artist's relationship to the artwork is a privileged one, and how might this be reflected in the content/organization of the documentation? These discussions lead to the study's central research question: What is the function of the artist interview within the body of artwork-related documentation in an institutional collection?

The core of the study is formed by three case-study chapters that compile data from fieldwork, literature review and archival research (Chapters 2, 3 and 4). Their order mirrors the course of the two-phase investigation. Data collected during Phase I is described and analysed in Chapter 2, "Setting the scene: Meanings, Sanctions and Properties. Mirosław Bałka and the many institutional approaches to conserving his work". It provides a basis for reflecting on institutional collaboration with artists on their collected works, extracts key concepts and defines problems. This part of the research follows 'theoretical sampling' – initial data collection without fixed a priori theoretical assumptions. Thus, the study begins by exploring 'familiar' or 'established' cases that confirm and support – but also question, contradict or reject – preliminary theoretical ideas. Three notions broadly discussed in theoretical conservation scholarship have been selected as starting points: the 'artwork's meaning', 'artist's sanctions' and 'significant properties'. These are tested against three artworks by Mirosław Bałka hosted by three different collections. In the process, two main sites of tension facing contemporary art museums are identified. Firstly, tensions arising through institutions' classification systems, which distribute works of art between different realms of the museum, and secondly, those stemming from the relationship

between artists and institutions. This observation leads to the establishment of three focal points to guide further empirical investigation into museums (Phase II): artwork-related documentation, the internal organisation of a museum and its collection-care practices, and collaboration with artists on presenting and preserving their musealised artworks.

The outcome of Phase II is presented in Chapters 3 and 4, which describe and analyse case studies carried out at various museums in Europe and the US. Both chapters scrutinise the condition of contemporary artworks as collectibles, analyse institutional museum–artist collaboration practices oriented towards presenting and preserving, and look at how this collaboration is recorded in artwork-related documentation. Chapter 3, "Danh Vo's 'Chandeliers Project': 'For any future exhibition of the piece, please contact the artist'", scrutinises museums as collectors of objects, and considers how their traditional, object-driven classificatory principles influence how they care for contemporary art. Auxiliary notions such as 'art project' and 'artwork constituency' help to understand how contemporary artworks are musealised, and make evident how inherent features of the 'new kind of art', combined with current museum procedures, have turned musealisation into a potential threat to the artwork's integrity. The case study considers an art project by Danh Vo that resulted in three artefacts, each collected by a large institution. What we find is that in the museum, the identity of the contemporary artwork, distributed between physical objects and the stories which contextualise them, becomes divided between two institutional realms – the collection and the archive – which are governed by different rules and procedures. The case demonstrates that, whereas institutions invest in care for the objects in their collection, the documentation that may carry the bulk of an artwork's identity often receives less attention and resources.

The above observations are confirmed in Chapter 4, "Barbara Kruger's Wall-Wraps: The distributed artwork in the light of the artist interview", which analyses in detail the distribution of a particular contemporary artwork between various domains of the museum, and the consequences this has had for the artwork's perpetuation. The piece in question lacks a stable material representation, and exists in the museum as a set of digital files. By reflecting on the foundations of the museum as a concept, this chapter proposes that upon musealisation the artwork transforms into stories recorded in documents that represent it. In the digital era, where these stories are stored as records

in databases, the quality of this representation follows the logic of accumulation – more stories that interact with each other allow for a more accurate picture of the artwork. This interaction, however, must be fostered via research. The investigation brings into focus complex interpersonal relationships that govern the institutional collecting of contemporary art and influence the collaboration between artists and institutions. Through critical analysis of an interview conducted with the artist, scrutinised both as a method and as a source, this chapter shows how these relationships might impact the implementation of novel methods for the institutional care of contemporary artworks.

Chapter 5, "Artworks, Archives and Interviews: Reinventing institutional practices", summarises the findings of the empirical part of the study and confirms the hypothesis that the problem with implementing novel contemporary art conservation methods in art museums is linked to the object-based principles governing museum organisation and collection-care practices, in addition to the complex relationship between artists and art institutions. Employing and extending concepts introduced by conservation theorist Hanna Hölling, and building on the notions of 'artwork-related documentation' and anarchives as introduced in Chapter 1, this chapter proposes a solution aimed at helping to adapt the existing museum structure to the needs of contemporary art. It features a model of the 'artwork-as-an-(an)archive', based on the evidence that the museum's traditional division between objects and documents, and in consequence collections and archives, is rendered obsolete by contemporary art. Possible ways of implementing the model are presented through examples from museums that have come up with innovative documentation strategies in line with the model's specifications. Furthermore, issues with the accessibility of artwork-related documents and the willingness to share them – one requirement for successful implementation of the model – are discussed in relation to the examples from the empirical portion of the study. The final section addresses the artist interview and its possible functions within the proposed model. Understanding contemporary artworks as archives transforms the artist interview into a source, method and tool. Viewed as a source, it is a significant part of any artwork being collected. As a collaborative method, it helps negotiation the shape and content of the artwork understood as an archive. Finally, as a full-fledged research tool for both collecting and conserving, it fosters interaction among the archive's records, and can be used as a 'key' to the archive – an interpretative tool used to analyse and unravel it.

Samenvatting

Een archief van objecten en verhalen:
De toekomst van hedendaagse kunst in een museum

Twintigste- en eenentwintigste-eeuwse kunst vormt een uitdaging voor de traditionele beginselen van conservering en restauratie. In de jaren '80 ontwikkelde de restauratie van moderne en hedendaagse kunst zich tot een aparte specialisatie om met de moderne materialen en nieuwe technologieën die door 20e -eeuwse kunstenaars werden gebruikt om te kunnen gaan. Hoewel technisch materiaalgericht onderzoek nog steeds een belangrijk onderdeel is van het vakgebied , is sinds het begin van de 21e eeuw het accent verschoven naar de immateriële eigenschappen van het werk. Beeldende kunstwerken worden gewoonlijk gezien als bestendige, unieke, materiële entiteiten die op een bepaald ogenblik werden gecreëerd en voltooid, en traditionele restauratietheorieën waren op deze invalshoek gebaseerd. De kunst die in de laatste decennia werd geproduceerd, in het bijzonder de hedendaagse kunst, heeft zich echter dikwijls verzet tegen deze beginselen. Dogma's van de restauratie zoals materiële authenticiteit, intentie van de kunstenaar, reversibiliteit, minimale interventie en de overtuiging dat de integriteit van een object besloten ligt in zijn fysieke eigenschappen werden ondermijnd. Deze discrepantie, en de praktische gevolgen ervan, hebben wetenschappers en restauratoren ertoe gebracht concepten en gereedschap te zoeken die een effectieve omgang met deze 'nieuwe' kunst faciliteren, waardoor nieuwe theoretische kaders, modellen, 'tools' en benaderingen ontstonden. Het toepassen hiervan is echter lastig. Het probleem is namelijk dat hedendaagse kunst een van de hoofdtaken van musea ter discussie stelt: het behouden.

Dit proefschrift focust op deze kloof tussen de zich snel ontwikkelende theorie van de conservering en restauratie van hedendaagse kunst en de starheid van de institutionele praktijk. De invalshoek van het onderzoek is de driehoek gevormd door de wederzijdse relaties tussen de kunstenaar, het museum, en het hedendaagse kunstwerk als verzamelobject, en het onderzoekt hoe hedendaagse kunstwerken

worden verzameld, gedocumenteerd en geconserveerd in contemporaine instellingen. Door het samenwerken tussen kunstinstellingen en kunstenaars te onderzoeken, met een speciaal accent op het kunstenaarsinterview, kijkt het proefschrift naar hoe, en of, nieuwe methodes die in het veld van de conservering en restauratie van hedendaagse kunst zijn ontwikkeld worden overgenomen door musea, en probeert de factoren te identificeren die de effectiviteit ervan ondermijnen. Het onderzoek poogt een oplossing te vinden welke respecteert dat collecties in musea een centrale plaats innemen, en tegelijk diepgaande vragen te stellen over het wezen van hedendaagse kunstwerken in relatie tot traditionele museumsstructuren. Door de discrepanties tussen deze twee opvattingen in kaart te brengen, werkt dit onderzoek toe naar een theoretisch model dat de verschillen kan overbruggen.

In hoofdstuk 1, "Contemporary Art, the Artist Interview, Documentation and Conservation: Establishment of terms and survey of practices", worden vier sleutelbegrippen gedefinieerd – hedendaagse kunst, kunstenaarsinterview, documentatie, conservering. Deze definities zijn gebaseerd op literatuur uit de kunstgeschiedenis en -theorie, curatorial studies, conservering, oral history en de archivistiek. Twee van deze begrippen – het kunstenaarsinterview en de documentatie – worden voorgesteld als 'model'-concepten, hetgeen vragen oproept over de relatie tussen deze begrippen. Hoewel in het niet-hiërarchische model van de kunstwerkgerelateerde documentatie alle elementen een gelijke status hebben, kunnen ze niettemin verschillende functies hebben. Als bovendien de relatie die de kunstenaar met het kunstwerk heeft een geprivilegieerde positie inneemt, hoe wordt dit dan in de inhoud/structuur van de documentatie weerspiegeld? Deze overwegingen bereiden de weg voor de centrale onderzoeksvraag: wat is de functie van het kunstenaarsinterview in bestaande kunstwerkgerelateerde documentatie in institutionele collecties?

De kern van het onderzoek bestaat uit drie casestudy's die gegevens halen uit veldonderzoek, literatuuronderzoek en archiefonderzoek (hoofdstukken 2, 3 en 4). De volgorde weerspiegelt het verloop van het tweesporige onderzoek. Gegevens die in fase I zijn verzameld worden beschreven en geanalyseerd in hoofdstuk 2, "Setting the scene: Meanings, Sanctions and Properties. Mirosław Bałka and the many institutional approaches to conserving his work". Dit hoofdstuk legt de basis

voor een reflectie over institutionele samenwerking met kunstenaars wanneer hun werken deel uitmaken van de collectie; er volgen kernconcepten die een verdere definitie krijgen. Dit deel van het onderzoek is gebaseerd op 'theoretical sampling' – er worden eerst gegevens verzameld zonder theoretische vooronderstellingen. Het onderzoek begint daarom met het bestuderen van 'vertrouwde' of 'gevestigde' cases, die eerdere theoretische ideeën ondersteunen en bevestigen – deze deels echter ook ter discussie stellen, ermee in tegenspraak zijn, of verwerpen. Drie begrippen die breed uitgemeten zijn in wetenschappelijke publicaties over restauratietheorie werden als uitgangspunt genomen: de 'betekenis van het kunstwerk', 'artist's sanction' (het 'fiat van de kunstenaar') en de 'kenmerkende eigenschappen'. Deze worden aan de hand van drie kunstwerken van Mirosław Bałka uit drie verschillende collecties getoetst. Hieruit worden de twee voornaamste spanningsgebieden voor musea voor hedendaagse kunst afgeleid. Ten eerste, spanningen die ontstaan door de classificatiesystemen van instellingen die kunstwerken aan verschillende domeinen van het museum toewijzen. Ten tweede, spanningen die voortkomen uit de relaties tussen kunstenaars en instellingen. Deze observatie leidt tot het vastleggen van drie focuspunten die verder empirisch onderzoek in musea sturen (fase II): kunstwerkgerelateerde documentatie, de interne structuur van een museum en hoe collectiebeheer wordt uitgevoerd, en de samenwerking met kunstenaars betreffende de presentatie en het behoud van hun gemusealiseerde werken.