Magdalena Anna Nowak

|From Object to Documentation. The New Media Collection at the National Museum in Warsaw

January 2013 marked the opening of the Gallery of 20th and 21st Century Art at the National Museum in Warsaw. For the first time, the gallery became the home of moving image art purchased by the museum and several films obtained through cooperation with the National Film Archives. The introduction of video art to the Collection of Modern Art entailed establishing a new sub-collection within it (**fig. 1**). The New Media Collection was officially established by way of a resolution of the museum authorities of 29 April 2013.

For the first time in a long while, an inventory book was established in the museum which boasts 237 such books altogether and over 800,000 works of art listed therein. We felt that we were turning over a new leaf in the history of the institution. Even the choice of the inventory name, "New Media," involved great responsibility and was not an obvious one. On the other hand, we were aware of the fact that the modest new collection merely supplemented the vast and structured set of objects. This event gave us an opportunity to thoroughly analyse the possibilities and limitations associated with the exhibition, storage and conservation of new media art.

New media – to quote Ryszard W. Kluszczyński's definition – may be understood as: "art created using technical media; electronic, digital, interactive and network media art."[1] This definition refers to various artistic activities, such as slide projections, sculptures incorporating video or film images or sound, net art, time-based installations and artworks using computer technologies. Importantly enough, experiencing new media requires the passage of time,[2] while their physical existence is based on two components: encoded signal and display. Signal is understood as encoded sounds or images which require specific equipment to be decoded. Examples of the above include audio and video magnetic tapes, CDs, DVDs and computer programmes. Display, on the other hand, refers to the space, lighting, sound and equipment used to present the work.[3]

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[1] Ryszard W. Kluszczyński, *Estetyka sztuki nowych mediów* [online], [retrieved: 22 November 2013], p. 30, at: <http://www. medialarts. pl/download/skrypty/Estetyka-sztuki-nowych-mediow.pdf>.

[2] Pip Laurenson, "Developing Strategies for the Conservation of Installations Incorporating Time-Based Media: Gary Hill's *Between Cinema and a Hard Place*" [online], *Tate Papers*, vol. 1 (2004 [retrieved: 22 November 2013], at: <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/developing-strategies-conservation-installations-incorporating>.

[3] Marie-Catherine Cyr, "Conservation Issues: The Case of Time-Based Media Installations" [online], *ANAGPIC*, vol. 1 (2007), p. 2 [retrieved: 22 November 2013], at: <https://www.ischool.utexas.edu/~anagpic/2007pdf/2007ANAGPIC_Cyr.pdf>.

Our aim was not only to define the new collection, but also to link it to other collections presented at the museum. New media are somewhat opposed to traditional media, such as painting, graphic arts, sculpture or photography. At present, the collection includes, i.a., video art, computer-based art, digitalized presentations of analogue photographs as well as recordings of performance art and interventions. The works date to the 1970s, 80s, 90s and the beginning of the 21st century. The New Media Collection (NMC) exists not only within the museum as a whole; it became part of the Collection Modern Art, which comprises art created after 1914. As the primary motivation behind the purchase of video works was the creation of a permanent gallery, they were above all meant to supplement 20th-century art, creating a context for works which had already been present in the collection. This function was also fulfilled by early Polish avant-garde films obtained from the National Film Archives, thanks to which the vision of Polish art immortalized in paintings and prints was supplemented with a medium that experienced a rapid development in the 1920s and 30s, shaping the imagination of artists and art audiences alike.

To a large extent, the collection of modern art owes its current form to Jerzy Zanoziński (1910–96), who curated it between 1960 and 1983. With hindsight, it is possible to assess his choice of works accepted to the collection with greater reserve, although it is not easy to evaluate this process. Zanoziński mostly collected paintings, his purchase decisions were quite conservative, and he was not particularly interested in avant-garde movements. It is for this reason that 1970s and 1980s art in NMW is almost solely represented by paintings created by artists whose position had already been established at the time. Ephemeral and performance art, installations or works with a complicated media status are almost non-existent. This is why the first purchases made by the NMC in 2013 were the recordings of two performances by Zbigniew Warpechowski: *The Short Electrical Love Story* (1979) and *March* (1984), two works by Akademia Ruchu (Academy of Movement): *Bus II* (1975) (**fig. 2**) and *Europe* (1976) as well as *Compositional Games* (1977) by Zygmunt Piotrowski (**fig. 3**) and *The Raft of Medusa* (1982) by Tomasz Sikorski (**fig. 4**). The gallery also includes two works by Józef Robakowski: *More Air!* (1985) and *From My Window* (1978–99), *Liberating Exercises* (1983–87) by Marek Janiak and *Films and Animations* (1990–2010) by Robert Brylewski. In the 1970s and 1980s, Polish artists began to depart from the modernist paradigm of a work of art that ought to be independent from non-artistic reality, allowing the historical and social context to permeate their works. The heyday of independent galleries operating next to art schools or *Empik*[4] clubs, as well as a greater number of festivals, biennales and plein-airs also made artists open up more to their surroundings. Groups such as, for example, Akademia Ruchu relinquished studios and galleries, taking their actions to the public space. Warpechowski is recognized as a pioneer of performance art not only in Poland, but worldwide. Such interventions are a perfect example of art of the time; it would be difficult to convey the atmosphere of that period by displaying paintings alone.

Some of these works were made using a 16-mm camera (e.g., *The Short Electrical Love Story*, *Europe*, *Bus II*), a VHS camera (*March*) and an 8-mm camera (*The Raft of Medusa*). *Compositional Games* are analogue photographs. *Films and Animations* were edited on a computer. However, all of the above works are exhibited at the museum in digital format. The museum did not purchase the original media, but a licence to show and loan the works, including the right to use images. This is a peculiar situation, one that is not typical of museum institutions:

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[4] International Press and Book Club. *Empik* clubs performed the function of cultural centres and pressrooms – [translator's note].

instead of the original work of art, a digital copy thereof has been purchased. How should one understand it? How should the memory of the initial form of the work be preserved in the museum in such cases? How should we deal with the change of format and the resulting change of the aesthetics, maybe even the meaning of the work?

The establishment of a new inventory book enabled us to reflect upon the future (what to collect, how to store, how to classify), but also upon the past (how objects used to be separated and classified, what was the reaction to the emergence of "other" media, how was the distinction made between what constitutes a work of art and what merely its documentation). In the case of works stored on digital carriers, it was necessary to analyse whether only digital copies would be collected or whether original materials, often created on other carriers, were more important for us. What constitutes a copy and what an original work in the digital age and what is the museum's attitude to this problem? How should information on such works be stored and archived? How – given the limited space – should the works be displayed? Who should prepare works for the exhibition and how should this be done?

The current knowledge on archiving digital works and analogue moving images or installations is growing very rapidly. However, some 20 years ago this field was still in its infancy. Museum employees, librarians, archivists and gallery owners have often had to grope their way on the new media art market.[5] The United States is definitely a pioneer in this field, as the cradle of video art mavericks who first came up against the problem of regulating the status of a work of art within museum institutions and galleries. If we assume the turn of the 1960s and 1970s as the time when the presence of video and kinetic art at exhibitions and festivals became very intense, then the Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI)[6] – a not-for-profit organization established in New York in 1971 – may be regarded as a swift and proper reaction. The EAI was founded by Howard Wise (previously the owner of the Howard Wise Gallery) in order to protect and distribute video and media art. Its collection currently includes 3500 objects which are made available to interested institutions for a fee. The Howard Wise Gallery hosted the most important media art exhibitions of the 1960s, such as "On the Move" (1964), "Lights in Orbit" (1967), or "TV as a Creative Medium" (1969). It turned out that the traditional principles governing the operations of galleries and the market were not adapted to technological challenges, such as the fact that artists often did not control the number of the so-called "original copies," relishing the possibility of their unrestricted distribution. On the one hand, restrictions to the dissemination of video works introduced by EAI enabled artists to control the quality of copies and the manner of their display, which basically enabled them to enter the art market (galleries and museum had previously been reluctant to purchase video works on account of doubts as to the originality of the copy and concern that other institutions might purchase the same work). On the other hand, some artists were strongly attached to the idea of "liberating" the artwork from market control. They were also in favour of the postulate to make their works available to broad audiences at a low cost. This imperative was somewhat squandered due to the advent of programmes such as EAI,[7] although copyright matters and free access to new media art are still subject to debate – all

[5] Carey Stumm, "Preservation of Electronic Media in Libraries, Museum, and Archives," *The Moving Image: The Journal of the Association of Moving Image Archivists*, vol. 4, no. 2 (2004), pp. 38–63.

[6] Website: www.eai.org/index.htm.

[7] Another important video art distributor in the U.S. is the Video Data Bank, established in 1976 at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC). Website: www.vdb.org.

the more so given platforms such as UbuWeb (and the Filmoteka – film library – of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw in Poland) which make works available online (without the possibility to present them publicly at exhibitions). In 1973, the Artist Videotape Distribution Service was established within the EAI in order to enable the distribution of and access to collected works, in 1986 – the EAI Preservation Program, focusing on the conservation of moving image art. EAI's programme "manifesto" contains the objectives of this institution: "It is the purpose of Electronic Arts Intermix to assist the video artist in making an increasingly significant contribution to the development of non-broadcast television during these formative years. To this end, it is sponsoring a number of projects [...]. We expect gradually to develop our present facilities to permit videotape production. We plan to ask museum, public service organizations, universities, and selected community groups to work with us to produce programming of educational as well as aesthetic merit."[8]

   As more and more professionals became consciously interested in establishing video collections, further institutions followed. In 1997, New Art Trust, founded by collectors Pamela and Richard Kramlich, was established in San Francisco in cooperation with the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA) and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMoMA). It was dedicated first and foremost to video art. New Art Trust and its current director Christopher Eamon take great efforts to promote the so-called good practices of storing and displaying new media art. The following decade saw further initiatives, such as Matters in Media Art[9] organized by Tate in London and New Art Trust together with MoMA and SFMoMA. This is a programme for the years 2003–15, which is to assist collectors of time-based artworks. The aim of the project is to exchange information between institutions, share solutions, advice and ideas on managing collections of such works, effecting purchases and inter-institutional loans. Another important programme is the Documentation and Conservation of the Media Arts Heritage (DOCAM)[10] under the auspices of Daniel Langlois Foundation for Art, Science and Technology in Montreal. This is a 2005 initiative, whose objective is to foster cooperation between academics, researchers, students and technicians in the scope of the exchange of knowledge and practices related to new media conservation. In addition to that, professionals from the Variable Media Network[11] (also initiated by the Langlois Foundation and the Salomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York) developed new formulas of approaching new media art. Artworks ceased to be classified depending on the medium type, but instead received a description that explored not the "existence," but the "behaviour" of a work of art. What was highlighted was how all components of the work created meaning through their functioning and behaviour, how – irrespective of the carrier or medium – the work "functioned." A work of art may simply be defined based on whether it is installed, reproduced, presented, interactive, encoded, etc. – i.e., based on what is happening to it and why.[12] This is in line with the post-media vision of art presented by Rosalind Krauss in

   [8]   Howard Wise, *Electronic Arts Intermix, Inc. At the Leading Edge of Art* [online], 1973, p. 8 [retrieved: 25 November 2013], at: <http://eai.org/user_files/supporting_documents/leadingedge.pdf>.

   [9]   Website: www.tate.org.uk/about/projects/matters-media-art.

   [10]   Website: www.docam.ca.

   [11]   Website: www.variablemedia.net.

   [12]   Caitlin Jones, *Variable Media: Case Study from the Guggenheim Museum* [online], lecture given on 17 January 2006, [retrieved: 15 November 2013], at: <http://www.docam.ca/en/seminars/seminar-2006/141-variable-media-case-study.html>.

her book *Voyage on the North Sea. Art in the Age of Post-Medium Condition* (2000). The author proved that thinking in terms of medium had become anachronistic. Krauss believes that one should focus on the functioning of the work and its links it to other works rather than on the strict distinction between various media.[13]

Another programme that is worth mentioning is Inside Installations: The Preservation of Installation Art[14] – a 3-year programme established in 2004 which consists in the creation of 30 specific case studies that may be used as examples of video conservation and installation practices.

A modern museum is the product of Enlightenment ideas; even though 21st-century museums are vastly different from their predecessors, they have remained faithful to the positivist paradigm. A museum's actions are still structured around certain views, such as, e.g., the authenticity and integrity of an artwork or the concept of the artist's intentions. However, these principles do not entirely apply to new media art. Ephemeral or immaterial works created using technical media require the development of strategies that will emphasize not the object alone, but – above all – the conditions and context of its creation, display and reception, which are more important than the sole fact of its material existence. Were we to stop treating authenticity as a fundamental concept for a museum, we would have to reject its Enlightenment vision.[15] In the 1920s, in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Walter Benjamin pointed to the impossibility of maintaining the old interpretation of authenticity when it was possible to create endless reproductions of an artwork.[16] Benjamin wrote about the development trends in art in the production conditions that existed at the time – when "outmoded concepts, such as creativity and genius, eternal value and mystery" were brushed aside.[17] However, it was the artists themselves who wreaked havoc in museum structures when they began to create works that transgressed the boundaries of traditional media, introduced the time factor to artworks and began to combine elements of various systems, departing from the paradigm of modernist art so brilliantly described by Clement Greenberg.[18]

Still, the controversy as to what should be held at museums and how was not related to new media alone. In the 1950s, the approach of some conservators from the National Gallery in London to Old Master paintings proved controversial, sparking a debate on the legitimacy of returning to the initial condition of a work of art. The conservators argued that they wanted to uncover the original appearance of works in order to bring paintings to a condition that best reflected the intentions of their creators. However, some researchers, including Ernst Gombrich, objected to actions that erased the entire later history of the work and the related

[13] Rosalind Krauss, *Voyage on the North Sea. Art in the Age of Post-Medium Condition* (New York, 2000).

[14] Website: www.inside-installations.org.

[15] Didier Delmas, *Electronic Arts Unplugged: Museum Politics and the Preservation of New Media* [online], materials from the DOCAM seminar, 2006, p. 2, [retrieved: 15 November 2013], at: <http://www.docam.ca/images/stories/pdf/seminaires/2006_01_didier_delmas.pdf>.

[16] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," trans. Harry Zohn, in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York, 1968) [online], [retrieved: 13 October 2014], at: <http://www.udel.edu/History/suisman/611_S05_webpage/benjamin-work-of-art.pdf>.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," in *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 3: *Affirmations and Refusals, 1950–1956*, John O'Brian, ed. (Chicago, 1993), pp. 85–93.

cultural memory.[19] Therefore, the traditionally understood intention of the artist does not have to be a priority. Delmas demonstrated how the concept of intention functions in relation to reproducible new media and compared them to the music of Bach. The composer wrote some of his pieces for the organ. However, today his music is often played on the piano. What is more, it exists not only in the form of notation, but also in its ephemeral form as a performative event. In order to cause it, we need a pianist/interpreter able to play the work.[20] By analogy, when equipment initially used to display new media art becomes obsolete, new substitutes are required. In a way, each exhibition is a reinterpretation of the original work and reformulation of the artist's original intention, but still – like in the case of music – it remains the work of the original author. The relationship between art and technology meant that conservators active in the late 20th century were not able to focus solely on the material nature of objects. Furthermore, as technical media quickly become outdated, they also had to reformulate their interpretation of authenticity. They were faced with the desire to preserve the original appearance of the work on the one hand and maintaining its functionality on the other. In this line of thinking, the intention of the artist remains important, but more so is the viewer – who should, despite the passage of time, have access to the work, which often requires updating or even changing the technology in which it was made. Repainting an oil painting with acrylic paint may be unthinkable, but in the case of new media art it is often advisable to convert it to new carriers.

According to Caitlin Jones, a researcher associated with the Langlois foundation, the departure from the concept of a unique object is associated with the vision of new media as a set of guidelines rather than masterpieces.[21] It follows that instead of preserving the original material form of the work, it is worth focusing on the artist's instructions, the function of the work and what it expresses, and to treat these elements as rules that will assist future generations in re-installing the work, even when it is no longer possible to use the original equipment or consult the artist. The best way to collect such instructions is through an interview/questionnaire with the artist which should be preserved as an integral part of the work.[22] The methods of displaying new media art may vary greatly from exhibition to exhibition – the artists themselves often change their mind about the appearance of installations, as a result of which a given work may even change its meaning. In spite of the above, it will still bear the same title and be regarded as the same object. That is why it is vital to document each subsequent appearance of the work in photographs and writing, so that future researchers may understand how it evolved

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[19]   Delmas, op. cit., p. 5.

[20]   Ibid., p. 7.

[21]   Jones, op. cit.

[22]   The questionnaire should contain information on the number of editions of the work, the names of institutions holding the remaining editions and an indication of whether the licence purchased from the artist only enables the presentation of the work or also its loan. Thanks to the surveys, it is possible to store the "intentions of the artist" concerning both the meaning and context of the work as well as knowledge on the preferred equipment and manner of exhibition and possibilities to deviate from these assumptions. The most favourable situation is the artist's presence during the preparations to exhibit his or her work. The artist should accept each potential change or deviation from the initial technological assumptions. However, not all artists like this type of work; this could also result in high costs of preparing the exhibition. Artists may also change their mind and concept rather frequently, which poses a serious problem for the curator: how to meet their dynamic demands? Researchers from the Variable Media Network have created the so-called Variable Media Questionnaire (www.variablemediaquestionnaire.net), a website that helps to create such surveys. The Tate – Matters in Media Art website features sample templates <http://www.tate.org.uk/about/projects/matters-media-art/templates-acquisitions>.

or how its reception might have evolved due to the use of different equipment. The task of the museum is to document all "lives of the work," as during each exhibition it is brought to life or even created anew. The museum is no longer interested solely in "accumulating" works, but in collecting documentation concerning them. However, this does not mean that the care and preservation of original carriers has become meaningless. There are four conservation strategies applied to new media.

> **Refreshing** means the transfer of information recorded in a given format to a new version in the same format (e.g., copying a film from one CD to another CD). This operation is different to copying – a term used with reference to traditional works of art. In the case of, say, oil paintings, the ensuing copy is not an original work. In turn, thanks to refreshing we achieve a new original document. However, during the refreshing of analogue works, for example a VHS tape, information on the new copy does not retain the quality of the original, like in the case of "refreshing" digital information.

> **Migration** means converting electronic media from their initial format to one that is more modern and durable. The objective here is to prevent the storage of obsolete formats, which will be impossible to decode. This might be, for example, the conversion of VHS magnetic tapes to digital files recorded on a CD.

> **Emulation** is a more controversial method of conserving and presenting works. It consists in creating equipment able to imitate its former versions which have become obsolete in the meantime. As a result, it will be possible to decode the signal on new equipment, but it will be preserved in a format identical to the original. However, it is worth noting that this process is not without consequences for the meaning of the work!

> **Reinterpretation** means re-enacting and reconstructing the work more freely thanks to the artist's instructions. This might refer to re-enacting a performance or reconstructing a work which had ceased to exist.

The conscious and precise process of archiving and documenting moving image works made using various technical or digital media is above all meant to serve future generations. We are now aware of what was not yet so obvious 30 years ago: new media grow old very rapidly and it is difficult to foresee the development of technology. In a sense, the task of museum employees is to guide their successors – the future researchers – through contemporary technologies and enable them to engage in the so-called media archaeology. This term refers to a fledgling field of science situated between media history, art history, technology, archaeology and cultural studies. The founders of this discipline include, among others, Siegfried Zielinski (Universität der Künste, Berlin) and Erkki Huhtamo (University of California, Los Angeles). The advent of new media forced many scientists to become involved in broader research on the culture of modern – not just contemporary – media. Huhtamo noted that the proponents of new technologies often ignore the past and only look towards the future. Yet in order to understand the current developments it is crucial to reflect not only upon the history, but above all on the archaeology of the media. The objective here is not to create a linear narrative of technological "development," but precisely the archaeology as defined by Michel Foucault in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.[23] On the one hand, media archaeologists are opposed to the

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[23] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London, 1972). See Erkki Huhtamo, Jussi Parikka, "Introduction: An Archaeology of Media Archaeology," in *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications*, Erkki Huhtamo, Jussi Parikka, eds (Berkeley–Los Angeles, 2011), pp. 1–24.

rejection of history by modern media culture, on the other – like the new historiographers – they are against canonical and genealogical narratives. The point is to draw attention to the relationship between past and current technologies.[24] Thanks to thorough documentation of the origin of museum collections and their previous "incarnations" future researchers will be able to gain better insight into the archaeology of these works. Therefore, it is not enough to merely accept works to the collection and describe their present condition, but it is vital to create an "archaeological register" and update it during each transformation of an artwork or its new rendition (re-enactment in a different form).

It seems that this line of thinking is very important for deliberations on the functioning of museums which present art from various historical periods, such as the National Museum in Warsaw. In 1947, when describing his concept of the imaginary museum (*musée imaginaire*), André Malraux emphasized how mechanical reproduction and new technologies of creating images had changed our way of understanding paintings and the visual culture.[25] Following the technological revolution (which began back in late 19th century and lasts to this day), the modern viewer perceives traditional media in the context of their contemporary substitutes. In the same way, the presence of new media in a museum influences the reception of old or traditional art by viewers – and by that I do not mean Internet apps or tablets with digital reproductions of painting. The sole fact that these works were created with new equipment in mind draws the attention to the "technological aspect" of old works and the presence of technology and media in the life of viewers and artists of all ages. In the words of Kluszczyński: "The presence of digital technologies in the world of contemporary artistic practices is of a dual nature, it creates two fundamental spheres of influence. The first is delineated by the coexistence of traditional art structures and new digital technologies. The latter enter the realm of artistic interventions undertaken in classical art disciplines, such as painting, drawing or sculpture, modifying their nature to some extent and developing (sometimes very radically) the instruments used. However, they do not categorically undermine the fundamental categories that define the artistic and aesthetic status of works created in those disciplines (such as form, representation, expression and the material nature of a work as an artefact). [...] The second area of art shaped by digital technologies is composed of new artistic disciplines, derived from new media and created based on digital technologies, such as computer animation, the Internet or virtual reality."[26] Consequently, this is no longer only about the image itself and its message, but about the understanding that technology in the museum narrative is vastly important for the interpretation and meaning of the work, like in the case of old media. As a result of studying the archaeology of works such as Robakowski's *More Air!* (displayed at the gallery in a digital version, originally recorded on a 16-mm camera) or Sikorski's *The Raft of Medusa* (originally recorded on an 8-mm camera) we obtain important information on their original context. Taking into account the dynamic situation in which both films were created, we may imagine the artists themselves at work. We may find out what equipment they were most likely to use, how much it weighed and, as a result, we may gain an insight into the camerawork. Even though the change of medium forever changes the

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[24] Huhtamo, Parikka, op. cit., pp. 1–24.

[25] André Malraux, *The Psychology of Art: Museum without Walls* (New York, 1949).

[26] Ryszard W. Kluszczyński, "Przeobrażenia sztuki mediów (Od filmu do sztuki interaktywnej)," in *Widok. Wro Media Art. Reader, nr 1: Od kina absolutnego do filmu przyszłości*, Violetta Kutlubasis-Krajewska, Piotr Krajewski, eds (Wrocław, 2009), pp. 36–37.

image quality, knowledge of the original recording enables one to understand the expressive dimension of the image and individual effects. This is how a museum may become not only a storeroom of objects, but a source of knowledge on the context of creating the work and the time in which it functioned.

Christopher Eamon, curator and director of the New Art Trust, often uses phrases such as "reviving the cadaver" or invokes the character of Frankenstein in order to talk about new media and all instances of preparing such art for display.[27] He believes that new technologies may have a negative impact on the appearance of old works, as the quality offered by new equipment is "too good," which paradoxically makes old works look worse than they originally did. Another reason why old recordings cannot be shown on LCD or plasma screens is the fact that the image format and edges may not fit the display. Old works should not be showcased in this manner, but they will anyway, as most galleries currently use such equipment. However, one ought to control the changes in the appearance and impact of low-quality material made available on equipment that was not created in order to display works of art, but is a product of the technical development of consumer society. The drive to constantly produce new equipment is fuelled by the entertainment-oriented market. Museums and galleries are condemned to use this type of devices, as they are rarely able to produce prototypes adapted to the individual requirements of artwork display. It is important to maintain the balance between attempts to prolong the life of an artwork, or "revive the cadaver" (convert it to new media) and attempts to convey the artist's original message. Therefore, the display of video art absolutely requires professionals who will be able to select equipment that is best suited to the requirements of the work. In their article "Zombie Media: Circuit Bending Media Archaeology into an Art Method," Garnet Hertz and Jussi Parikka describe the research object of media archaeology as "time of the living dead."[28] The authors are interested in media which become revived even though they are already obsolete and unused. In their opinion, they become "zombies" burdened with the history of the non-human (technical) factor in art. As a result, new media works become archives of sorts, containing numerous historical layers and cumulating within them memory and time.

Since the new media collection is located in a museum which showcases art of various periods, from antiquity to the 21st century, it is worth analysing it from the angle of old objects and theories. In his deliberations, Eamon refers to the Middle Ages, saying that: "We have to acknowledge that a lot of art we see from the Middle Ages, for instance, has been repainted fifteen times. Unfortunately, our Middle Ages gets condensed into five years. So if the Giotto was repainted four times, it happened over four centuries, whereas now everyone wants to repaint the Giotto every three years."[29] The researcher compares the 1960s to the times of Giotto in terms of their impact on later developments in art. In a nutshell, early video art should be treated like the works of Italian primitivists; they are equally valuable. However, lessons should be learned from what was often the fate of old works: they were "corrected," their fragments were reworked, and conservators are currently trying to reverse it in order to

[27] Interview with Christopher Eamon conducted by Lori Zippay in September 2005 [online], [retrieved: 15 October 2013], at: <http://www.eai.org/resourceguide/collection/singlechannel/interview_eamon.html>.

[28] Garnet Hertz, Jussi Parikka, "Zombie Media: Circuit Bending Media Archaeology into an Art Method," *Leonardo*, vol. 45, no. 5 (2012), p. 427.

[29] Interview with Christopher Eamon, op. cit.

arrive at a more genuine and original face of old art. At the same time, not everyone is aware that each instance of copying a 1960s or 1970s work also represents a kind of "repainting." The expression of the image is altered, the primary context of the work becomes lost. Of course both conversion and conservation are necessary, but the practices of copying artworks onto new carriers right after they emerge on the market are unfavourable. It is much better to wait for a couple of "seasons" of technological novelties and copy works less often, using the durability of the given medium to the maximum. Otherwise it might indeed transpire that after barely 30 years from the creation of the work, it will have undergone so many conversions that its relation to the original will largely have been lost.

Such deliberations again lead one to ponder over what constitutes a copy and what an original in new media art. Here, we can again refer to old art. In their book *Anachronic Renaissance*, Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood analyse the concept of substitution. In the course of their research on art created at the turn of the Middle Ages and modernity, they noticed that certain objects have a double "historicity:" we know that they were produced in contemporary times or the recent past, but they are granted the status of old works.[30] Therefore, it was not seen as problematic that the new artefact replaced the old, taking over all of its qualities and functions (especially cult ones). Nagel and Wood claim that this gave rise to the creation of a chain of replaceable replicas, which directly followed one another. The identity of the original work was transferred to the new work, which was a de facto copy.[31] This is a paradoxical situation: even though the material artefact is not original, at the same time it is treated as such, as if the value of the work was not related to matter at all, but to the meaning, function and "power" of the original attributed to it. Researchers suggest interpreting such objects as performative works, understood as an interaction between what is new and changeable in an artwork on the one hand, and what is conventional and permanent on the other.[32] It is difficult not to notice how much these deliberations have in common with the aforementioned nature of new media, especially the imperative to research the "behaviour" of works understood as performance. The subsequent "appearances" of works and their constant conversions to new media may be interpreted as substitution.

Equipment is meaningful for the message carried by the work. According to the motto "the medium is the message," coined by Marshall McLuhan in 1964,[33] it is impossible to separate the content from the carrier in the case of moving image. However, this is sometimes fetishized. Hal Foster dubbed this phenomenon mystical technologism; associating technology with mythical meanings or even links to religious experiences.[34] What is meant here is a type of techno-sublime, which attributes cult or religious qualities to technology instead of seeing it as a non-sensual, dry instrument of representation.[35] This is often related to the possibilities offered by installing new media, which enable the viewer to immerse in the artwork, practically

[30] Alexander Nagel, Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York, 2013), p. 29.

[31] Ibid., p. 31.

[32] Ibid., p. 15.

[33] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (London–New York, 2001), p. 7.

[34] Hal Foster, *Art Since 1900. Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*, Hal Foster et al., eds (London–New York, 2005), p. 676.

[35] Tanya Leighton, "Introduction," in *Art and the Moving Image. A Critical Reader*, Tanya Leighton, ed. (London, 2008), p. 34.

enter the picture, and consequently experience a near-mystical immersion in another being. A similar role may be played by media obsolescence, whether real or illusively created by artists. Like the regained aura described by Benjamin, media obsolescence may give viewers a sense of contact with something authentic and original. "Today the cult value would seem to demand that the work of art remain hidden. […] With the emancipation of the various art practices from ritual go increasing opportunities for the exhibition of their products,"**36** writes Benjamin. Paradoxically, however, it is difficult to imagine works more "hidden" than those stored on CDs or in computer memory. Like medieval cult objects, new media have to be presented to audiences in a special manner, since while they remain on their carriers, they are not material at all. Yet the process of fetishizing technology may have negative effects and lead to over-aestheticizing video projections. Most works shown at the National Museum in Warsaw are displayed on Nec screens, which are perfectly suited to the 4 : 3 format used in most works created before 1989. The screens are small, so they force the viewers to focus on works and they convey their original appearance rather well, without pretending to be the original equipment used at the time (**fig. 5**).

The role of the National Museum in Warsaw consists in obtaining important works for the collection and ensuring their proper conservation and display. Obtaining original carriers should also be in the interest of the institution, but – should this prove impossible – digital copies are equally important for us. The objective of the museum is to create a model documentation and lay down the rules of archiving the history of the works, not only in terms of their meaning, but also the technology in which they were created. Audiences are often familiar with works included in the collection (which will probably also be the case in the future). These include, for example, *Budget Story* (2007) by Oskar Dawicki (originally recorded on Digital Beta, **fig. 6**), *TV Game* (2005) by the Sędzia Główny Group (Chief Judge Group) or *Family* (2004) by the Azorro group (originally recorded on Beta SP). Some of them are featured in the online Filmoteka of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw (MSN). Works displayed in this manner, which may be viewed on the screens of personal computers, entirely lose their relationship with the original, as there is no control whatsoever of their reception by the viewers. A similar practice, albeit not quite as liberal, is in place at the Centre Pompidou in Paris: apart from installations shown at exhibitions of the museum's permanent collection, where conservators pay the utmost attention to conveying the original expression of the works, there is another room where one may view all works from the Pompidou collection on computer screens. The same idea is also used by the WRO Art Center in Wrocław, where the collection is also made available in the so-called media library. Like Pompidou and MSN, WRO presents these works as an archive of sorts, a study room, thanks to which researchers may familiarize themselves with a large amount of material at the same time. This indeed eliminates the problem of "hiding the work" related to new media, they are readily available practically all the time.

In comparison with the aforementioned institutions, NMW's new media section is still very modest. It is meant to interact with other museum collections and create intertextual meanings among them. The video works, performances and recordings of interventions are associated with the history of the institution, sometimes even directly, like Piotr Wysocki's work *Zikr* (2012) (**fig. 7**) created in our division – Królikarnia, on commission of the museum. We want this section to be compatible with the structure of our collection and to offer a critical

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36 Benjamin, op. cit.

self-commentary at the same time. Above all, however, we want it to enable an in-depth analysis of the standards of documentation and storage of the history of objects and their technological progression.

Translated by Aleksandra Szkudłapska