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Scripting Artworks: Studying the Socialization of Edited Video and Film Installations

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Introduction

In 2006, the Museum of Modern Art in New York presented a mid-career retrospective of Scottish artist Douglas Gordon.¹ *Play Dead; Real Time* (2003), a video installation featuring actions of an elephant from different angles and perspectives on multiple screens, was presented in the third room of the exhibition. When I entered the exhibition space, I was surprised to see that the videos were shown on two large-screens and two monitors, what in technical terms is called a four-channel video installation. When I had initially seen the work in the exhibition *Noah's Ark* organized by the National Gallery of Canada and presented in the Cité de l'énergie in Shawinigan, Quebec, in 2004, it was a three-channel video installation.² In Shawinigan, the different sequences of moving images were projected onto two large translucent screens and played on a video monitor whereas in New York, a second monitor was added to the installation. At the time, I knew that *Play Dead; Real Time* had been sold as an edition of three, which meant that three different collectors or institutions owned it and that the work could therefore be presented simultaneously in three different spaces. What intrigued me, however, was the different configuration of the work at the Museum of Modern Art. When I left the museum, I had several questions in mind: Why was it that two instantiations of what I thought was the *same* artwork were different? Was *Play Dead; Real Time* a three- or four-channel video installation? Was it an artwork that had different “versions”? If one of the editions of an editioned artwork is modified, what does it mean for the others editions? Who decides on how the work is going to be displayed? Why are there variations from one exhibition to another? Is it relevant or necessary to keep track of these changes, and if so, how?

Another visit, of the exhibition *Bas Jan Ader, Please don't leave me*, presented at the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen in Rotterdam that took place about a month later raised similar questions on the topic of editioned artworks and on the varied manifestations that video and film-based artworks can go through over time.³ Indeed, the reading of the introductory text of the exhibition puzzled me, as it ended with the following statement:

For technical reasons the 16 mm films are being shown on DVD. This enables visitors to view the films with as little interruption as possible and avoids the interference from the sound of multiple film projectors. This also detracts from the suggestion that these works are installations.

¹ *Douglas Gordon: Timeline*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 11 June – 4 September 2006. Curator: Klaus Biesenbach. Accessed July 4, 2011, <http://www.moma.org/visit/calendar/exhibitions/76>.

² *Noah's Ark*, Cité de l'énergie, Shawinigan, Quebec, 12 June – 3 October 2004. Organized by the National Gallery of Canada. Accessed July 4, 2011, http://www.gallery.ca/english/550_1124.htm.

³ *Bas Jan Ader, Please don't leave me*. Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam, 26 August – 5 November 2006.

This explanation left me feeling somewhat ambivalent. To facilitate the looped projection of Ader's films and to avoid the disturbance of the noise made by film projectors in the exhibition space, the institution chose to transfer them to a more recent format: video. In conservation science, this strategy is called a *migration*. Yet, it was also argued that by projecting the artist's films with video projectors rather than film projectors, the projected films would not be interpreted as installations. The fact is that, projected either by film or video projectors, these films would have remained projections. Ader's films, like many other artists' films, can either be screened in a cinema or exhibited in a museum. Therefore, they have several presentation formats and possibilities for subsequent manifestations. This time, when I left the exhibition space, I wondered: Does the choice of exhibition support matter to the viewer's experience of the work? How different it is to see these films on a video format rather than a film one? Should the audience be informed of these changes, and if so, how?

These two examples serve to illustrate that there is a degree of variability in the exhibition of video and film-based artworks. In the case of Douglas Gordon's *Play Dead; Real Time*, the number of monitors used in the presentation of the work depends on the size of the exhibition space and the path that the artist thinks the audience should cover. In the case of Ader, it raises the question of what is the medium: if conceived as films, should the works always be presented in the original format? These cases seem to indicate that the decisions regarding how to display such artworks are, in most cases, the result of discussions between different parties (artist, artist's assistants, curators, conservators, technicians), but also of other considerations: the size of the exhibition space, the equipment available, and so on.

My visit to the MoMA and to the Boijmans van Beuningen Museum in 2006 triggered a series of questions on editioned video and film installations for which I did not have any answer or could not readily find answers in the literature. While reading on the circumstances of apparition of contemporary art in a book written by French scholar Jean-Marc Poinot, I came across the term *socialization* and it helped me orient the direction of my research and I now wanted to study editioned video and film installations. Poinot asserts that the socialization of an artwork and its presence in the world are ensured by its *récits autorisés* (sanctioning narratives) – the statements accompanying it.⁴ The use of the term socialization is relevant since it implies that artworks are part of a bigger structure; they evolve in a network. In my research, I adapt this term as defined by Poinot and assert that the socialization of editioned video and film installations (and of many other artworks) is ensured

⁴ Jean-Marc Poinot, *Quand l'œuvre a lieu : L'art exposé et ses récits autorisés* (Geneva: Les presses du réel, 2008 [1999]), 128.

by the intersecting events that are their exhibition, distribution and preservation. Video and film installations are highly social objects; they do not consist of a unique and single material thing. Rather, these works have a variable nature, need to be reinstalled every time they are shown, and have a physical and material existence only when exhibited. Consequently, their socialization is ensured by different parties and events, and is the result of interactions within a whole network. Many mediators interact within this network and contribute to the “shaping” of these works. In the present dissertation, my interest lies in the mediations taking place and the roles of the mediators in the exhibition, distribution, and preservation of these artworks. Through case studies, I intend to make these mediations visible.

Core Problem of the Dissertation and its Relevance

In the last few decades, an increasing number of moving-image works have been presented in exhibition venues. Art historian Hal Foster even stated in 2003 that video and film-based works have become the medium per default of contemporary art.⁵ The medium of production of these time-based works (multi-channel videos, video installations, film installations, etc.) makes them more conducive to replication. Consequently, they can then be sold in editions, meaning that more than one institution or collector can acquire the “same” artwork. More importantly, these artworks need to be installed each time they are presented, a step that requires the interpretation of a series of prescriptions. The re-exhibition of a work can also lead to changes, for instance, in the display (as was the case with Douglas Gordon’s *Play Dead; Real Time* briefly discussed above), in the exhibition support (as was the case for the presentation of Bas Jan Ader’s films in Rotterdam) or in the technology used. During their “life cycle,” these artworks can go through varied configurations, which leads one to acknowledge that more than one version of a work of art exists. The present dissertation offers a reflection on the different modes of existence of video and film installations. It is an attempt to answer the question on how to capture the modes of existence of these works.

Tate Modern conservator Pip Laurenson suggests considering time-based media installations as existing “on the ontological continuum somewhere between performance and sculpture.”⁶ They share similarities with performances as they live through instantiations: between exhibitions, they have no concrete existence, as they are taken apart. They also share

⁵ “Round Table: The Projected Image in Contemporary Art” [Malcolm Turvey, Hal Foster, Chrissie Iles, George Baker, Matthew Buckingham, Anthony McCall], *October* 104 (Spring 2003): 93.

⁶ Pip Laurenson, “Authenticity, Change and Loss in the Conservation of Time-Based Media Installations,” *Tate Papers* (Autumn 2006), accessed July 4, 2011, <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/tatepapers/06autumn/laurenson.htm>.

similarities with sculpture because they are in three dimensions and expand in space when exhibited.⁷ Adding to this perspective, other features of video and film installations may be outlined. Among these features is their time-based nature, since these works have a duration – a loop can last from a few seconds to several hours; their limited life span due to the technology used to create and present them; their multi-instantiability, as they have the possibility to be exhibited more than once; and their accompaniment by a series of prescriptions indicating how they should be displayed.⁸ Bringing together all these considerations leads to the recognition of the variable nature of these artworks.

Video and film installations are two-step artworks: each of their manifestations begins with the interpretation of a series of prescriptions, the result of which is a physical manifestation of the work of art. This type of artwork belongs to what Nelson Goodman, and after him, Gérard Genette, have called the allographic regime. For Goodman and Genette, the types of objects that works of art can consist of can be subdivided into two regimes: autographic and allographic.⁹ Whereas paintings, sculptures, and drawings belong to the autographic regime because their object of immanence is a physical object, other art forms, such as music and theater, belong to the allographic regime. Since video and film installations need to be installed each time they are presented and their physical presence is temporary (it lasts the time of the exhibition), I suggest including them in the allographic regime.

Seeing as video and film installations have a variable nature, I contend that it is more productive to envisage them as processes rather than as stable objects. These artworks have a life that can be documented. It is also for this reason that throughout this dissertation, the metaphor of the artwork's life cycle is being used. Whereas life cycle is generally defined as the series of changes in the life of an organism, including reproduction, for the purposes of this dissertation, life cycle is defined as the series of changes in the life of an artwork, which includes, in some cases, its reproduction. As the case studies of the following chapters explain, the term reproduction can mean, in the case of editioned artworks, either duplication or the production of offspring. I prefer using the term "life cycle" to "biography," "trajectory"

⁷ For example, when a video installation is dissembled at the end of an exhibition, its support – either DVDs, Digital Betacam, High Definition Video – is stored in a vault or on a server of its owning institution, the projection screens are stored along with the rest of the audio-visual equipment. However, in some cases, if the audio-visual equipment is not proprietary to a specific artwork, it can be used in the presentation of other artworks.

⁸ I borrow the term "multi-instantiability" from philosopher Stephen Davies who uses it to describe musical works for performance, which have the possibility of being performed more than once. See: Stephen Davies, *Musical Works and Performances* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 13.

⁹ Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art. An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1976), 113-122; Gérard Genette, *The Work of Art: Immanence and Transcendence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 16-19.

or “career,” which are used by colleagues also doing research in this field, since the idea of reproduction fits better within the model of the life cycle.¹⁰ In this dissertation, I propose to study the history of the life cycle of a few editioned artworks by analyzing what happened to all their editions. I assert that if the history of a work were based on only one of its editions, it would be incomplete.

In the present dissertation, the focus is put on the intersecting events occurring in the life cycle of the artworks: the inaugural exhibition, the artwork’s distribution, its preservation, and the subsequent re-exhibitions. These events are crucial phases in the formation of the artwork’s identity. By the identity of the artwork I mean the features that define what the artwork actually consist of, both in material and conceptual terms (what it is made of, what it is about, what it means). Like many contemporary artworks, video and film installations cannot be described uniquely in material terms, because their materiality varies over time and they need to be reinstalled every time they are exhibited. Rather, the variable nature of these artworks calls for a conceptual approach. In the field of art conservation, Pip Laurenson has asserted that the identity of the work is what “describes everything that must be preserved in order to avoid the loss of something of value in the work of art.” Furthermore, she contends that the identity of these works

is defined by a cluster of work-defining properties which will include the artist’s instructions, artist approved installations intended to act as models, an understanding of the context in which they were made and the willingness and ability of those acting as custodians of the work to be sensitive in the realization of a good installation.¹¹

To Laurenson’s definition, I would add that the procedural nature of time-based artworks implies that their identity is constantly being redefined. Moreover, in the case of editioned artworks, the identity of these works is spread over a specific number of editions. It is all the editions that make the work. Also, if the work has known different states or versions, it is all the versions that define it.

¹⁰ The researchers involved in the project *New Strategies in the Conservation of Contemporary Art* use the term biography. See: <http://www.newstrategiesinconservation.nl>. In her doctoral dissertation, Vivian van Saaze has used the term career, term that come from Actor-Network-Theory, sociology and anthropology. See: “Doing Artworks. A Study into the Presentation and Conservation of Installation Works” (PhD dissertation, Universiteit Maastricht / Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage, 2009). Finally, in his book on Net Art, Jean-Paul Fourmentaux has also used the term career. See: *Art et Internet. Les nouvelles figures de la création* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2005). For further reading on the concept of career, see: Howard S. Becker, Robert R. Faulkner and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Editors’ Introduction: Art from Start to Finish,” in *Art from Start to Finish: Jazz, Painting, Writing, and Other Improvisations*, ed. Howard S. Becker, Robert R. Faulkner and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 4-5.

¹¹ Pip Laurenson, “Authenticity.”

The aim of this dissertation is primarily to understand how the exhibition, distribution and preservation contribute to the shaping of the identity of editioned video and film installations and secondly to develop a model for describing these works. The main research questions are: What are the conditions for editioned video and film installations' actualizations? Who are the mediators involved in the life cycle of these artworks? What are their influence(s) on the life cycle of editioned works of art? How do these mediators shape the identity of these works? And finally, how do they affect the works' socialization, its exhibition, distribution and preservation?

In order to answer these questions, this dissertation proposes the development of the notion of script as a methodological tool. The purpose of this tool is to study the mediations and mediators at work in the life cycle of editioned video and film installations. Script, as used in this doctoral dissertation, has been influenced by definitions such as the one proposed by Madeleine Akrich in the field of Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) and by Gérard Genette in the field of literary studies. Whereas for Akrich the script is a set of instructions implicit in the technical object, I propose an active theoretical standpoint: scripting artworks, which I define as a process to grasp the necessary conditions for time-based artworks' instantiations. Scripting an artwork is the conceptualization of what happens during the socialization process of an artwork (see Chapter Two). By developing a model to engage with the study of editioned video and film installations, this dissertation aims to help identify what these artworks actually consist of, taking into account that they are rather like processes than fixed objects. Furthermore, it intends to contribute to the domain of historiography of media art and more broadly, to the historiography of contemporary art. Seeing that many contemporary artworks are process-based and also have a variable nature, the findings of this study are also pertinent for many of these other works.

Contextualizing the Theoretical Problem

To study the life cycles and the socialization of editioned video and film installations, I decided to work at the intersection of four different fields: art history, sociology of art, museum studies and conservation science. Within these fields, research on contemporary art exhibition, distribution and preservation is fairly young. Whereas the topics of contemporary art exhibition and conservation are often intertwined in publications, the distribution of these works is seldom addressed or scrutinized. Martha Buskirk's book *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art* is certainly one that has covered important grounds on the very question of identifying what contemporary artworks actually *consist of* or *what they are*, having

addressed the issues of authorship, original and copies, and context in the practice of minimal artists, conceptual artists and pop artists. In this book, Buskirk scrutinizes the mediations that surround artworks, such as artist's statements and certificates.¹² A few years before, Jean-Marc Poinot, in *Quand l'œuvre a lieu : L'art exposé et ses récits autorisés*, wrote about the apparition modes of works of art at the end of the 1960s, and more precisely on conceptual art. Through numerous essays, he aimed to define the relationships between the artwork and the exhibition site. These essays begin by identifying the conditions surrounding the appearance of the artwork and by defining its limits, its scope and its circumstances.¹³ In his book, by studying the sanctioning narratives, the statements used by the artists to accompany their artworks, Poinot tries to identify the process by which each artist gives an image of his/her authority, of his/her intentions and of the work to preserve.¹⁴ In each of these two books, a great deal of attention is given to the mediations accompanying the artworks and their exhibitions. Both books demonstrate how crucial all these mediations are in the life cycle of artworks as they help understand how the identity of these artworks is constructed. Although Buskirk does not discuss editioned video installations, she does discuss the issue of editioned artworks, but without proposing a way to document the changes that occur in the life cycle of these works. Drawing from their writings, I propose a way to keep track of the different versions that an artwork can go through during its existence.

In the field of contemporary art conservation, quite a few volumes have been published since the 1990s. The contributors to these books have mainly been people working in museums and conservation laboratories since the awareness of the ephemerality of contemporary art caught up first with curators, conservators, and artists. Among pioneer publications in the field, which have rapidly become key references, one can mention: *Modern Art: Who Cares?* (1999), *Mortality Immortality? The Legacy of 20th-Century Art* (1999), and *Permanence Through Change: The Variable Media Approach* (2003).¹⁵ These collaborative volumes, which are very practice-oriented, offer food for thought as they gather perspectives from different actors in the art world: artists, curators, conservators, technicians and so on. In addition, they include reflections on the challenges of preserving contemporary artworks, and also on the rapidly changing nature of the field of art conservation. In fact,

¹² Martha Buskirk, *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2003).

¹³ Jean-Marc Poinot, *Quand l'œuvre a lieu*, 11.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁵ IJsbrand Hummelen and Dionne Sillé, ed., *Modern Art: Who Cares?* (London: Archetype, 2005 [1999]); Miguel Angel Corzo, ed., *Mortality Immortality? The Legacy of 20th-Century Art* (Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute, 1999); Alain Depocas, Jon Ippolito and Caitlin Jones, ed., *Permanence Through Change: The Variable Media Approach* (New York and Montreal: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation & The Daniel Langlois Foundation for Art, Science and Technology, 2003).

many contemporary artworks have a variable nature and call for a different approach than the traditional material approach. This has led curator Pip Laurenson to propose engaging with contemporary artworks using a conceptual approach.¹⁶

Whereas the research in the museum sector has been very active since the 1990s, it is only very recently that academic research on the preservation of contemporary art has emerged.¹⁷ For instance, Vivian van Saaze, in her doctoral dissertation, *Doing Artworks: A Study into the Presentation and Conservation of Installation Artworks*, shows, through three case studies, that it is not only the artists who produce the artworks, but that a lot of people and conditions are involved in the process of exhibiting and preserving installation art.¹⁸ She demonstrates that “doing artworks” is a dynamic and collaborative process. Van Saaze also contends that it is not only the nature of the artworks that has changed over the last decades, but also that museum practices have had to adapt to the challenges that come with the exhibition and preservation of installation art. Her dissertation has paved the way for further investigations in the field of presentation and preservation of installation artworks in museums. Building upon her contribution to the field, in my research, I added another dimension, the phase of distribution of editioned video and film installations.

Among the topics investigated in the present dissertation, the field of video and film installations’ distribution is certainly the one on which there are very few publications. There is literature on how the market of video and film-based artworks have evolved, such as Lori Zippay’s essay “The Digital Mystique: Video Art, Aura and Access” (2005) the collective publication *Content in Context: New Technologies for Distribution* (2005) and a chapter on video art in Noah Horowitz’s book *Art of the Deal: Contemporary Art in a Global Financial Market*.¹⁹ However, what is still missing are ontological considerations of what happens to these artworks once they have been distributed, once they have entered collections. When authors write about video or film-based works, the different editions constituting it and the

¹⁶ On this matter, see for instance Pip Laurenson’s article “Authenticity, Change and Loss in the Conservation of Time-Based Media Installations,” *Tate Papers* (autumn 2006), accessed July 4, 2011, www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/tatepapers/06autumn/laurenson.htm.

¹⁷ One can think of the Canadian DOCAM Research Project (Documentation and Conservation of the Media Art Heritage), 2005-2010 (www.docam.ca), the project *Réexposition, réactualisation et pérennité des œuvres contemporaines* directed by Francine Couture in Montreal, 2007-2010, and of the Dutch Research Project *New Strategies in the Conservation of Contemporary Art*, 2009-2013 (<http://www.newstrategiesinconservation.nl>).

¹⁸ Vivian van Saaze, “Doing Artworks. A Study into the Presentation and Conservation of Installation Artworks” (PhD dissertation, Universiteit Maastricht / Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage, 2009).

¹⁹ Lori Zippay, “The Digital Mystique: Video Art, Aura and Access,” in »Present Continuous Past(s)« *Media Art. Strategies of Presentation, Mediation and Dissemination*, ed. Ursula Frohne, Mona Schieren and Jean-François Guiton (New York: Springer Wien, 2005); Carling Masteling, Marieke Isha and Gaby Wijers, ed., *Content in Context: New Technologies for Distribution* (Amsterdam: Netherlands Media Art Institute, 2005); and Noah Horowitz, *Art of the Deal: Contemporary Art in A Global Financial Market* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011).

changes that they go through during their life cycle are seldom considered. To a certain extent, in my dissertation, I picked up where these authors left off and I not only discuss the editioning of video and film installations, but I also consider what happens to these editions once they are distributed in the art world.

The study at hand expands the existing approaches of contemporary art presentation, distribution and preservation in three ways. First, it contributes to the history of video and film installations with a novel and unique perspective, namely that of the exhibition history of these works. Second, it brings a new insight to art theory by exploring concepts from Actor-Network-Theory, music and performance studies that do justice to the dynamic, evolving and process-bound nature of time-based media. I am not the first person in the field to adapt such approaches, as Pip Laurenson has advocated an approach of time-based media artworks conservation based on literature on musical works and their performances, and Vivian van Saaze has used Actor-Network-Theory to study the presentation and conservation of installation artworks.²⁰ But my dealings with these theories differ from theirs because of my object of study – editioned video and film installation – and the concept that I adapted – the script, explained in Chapter Two. Third, the dissertation proposes a new model for describing editioned artworks of which multiple versions exist in order to help understand what the artwork actually consists of.

Methodology

The approach that has been chosen to study the life cycles of video and film installations was influenced by methodologies developed in other disciplines (sociology of techniques, Actor-Network-Theory, sociology of mediation, performance studies). Concepts from these disciplines have been borrowed and adapted in order to create a more appropriate framework to deal with the variable nature of video and film installations. Since the field of research in art exhibition, distribution and preservation is still in its infancy, it is mainly bottom-up research that is being done. Most researchers conduct case studies that lead them to uncover a number of recurrent features and thus progress to theories. I have also chosen to use this approach in my dissertation because I had identified three works that raised several questions, some of them similar, others different. Therefore, by comparing how the identity of these works evolved over time, I was able to outline a set of features on the socialization of editioned artworks.

²⁰ See Pip Laurenson, “Authenticity,” and Vivian van Saaze, “Doing Artworks.”

In this dissertation, I reconstruct the life cycles of three artworks: Douglas Gordon's *Play Dead; Real Time*, Mike Kelley's *Day Is Done* (and its offspring) and John Massey's *As the Hammer Strikes (A Partial Illustration)*. This is done through the study of the exhibition, distribution and preservation history of these works. Whereas in catalogues raisonnés one can find the complete list of exhibitions in which the work was shown, little is said on how the work has changed over time. The approach of video and film installations developed in this dissertation helps identify what the artwork was when first exhibited, how its identity has evolved over time and what it has become today.

My encounter with the artworks discussed in this dissertation occurred in very different contexts: one took place in the exhibition space, one through the reading of exhibition reviews, and one during an institutional encounter. My visit of the exhibition *Douglas Gordon: Timeline* at the Museum of Modern Art triggered a series of questions of the different "editions" and "versions" of a *same* artwork. My reading of exhibition reviews of Mike Kelley's 2005 exhibition *Day Is Done* and the fragmentation of a large-scale installation intrigued me as I started wondering how the "offspring" of this project were going to be exhibited afterwards and what kind of connections would be made to the inaugural exhibition. Finally, it was the fact that two acquisition files existed in the National Gallery of Canada's management system that aroused my interest in the different versions of John Massey's *As the Hammer Strikes (A Partial Illustration)* and the preservation process that had been chosen in the 1990s.

These three specific editioned artworks were selected because they raised different problems. In the case of Douglas Gordon's *Play Dead; Real Time*, it was mainly exhibition issues that were at stake: the work encountered variability in its presentation depending on the exhibition space at hand. The study of this artwork for this dissertation raises the question of how to document these changes and how changes made to one of the editions affect the other editions. Are we still talking about the *same* work? Or does a modified edition become a different artwork? The study of the life cycle of Mike Kelley's *Day Is Done* is challenging as the title itself – *Day Is Done* – refers to many things at once: a project, an exhibition, a large-scale installation, a book, and a film. Moreover, after its inaugural exhibition, *Day Is Done* was fragmented and the offspring sold as unique works of art. The distribution of this project is exceptional since certain offspring are editioned artworks and others are unique works of art. Once these offspring begin their life on their own, are they still related to their inaugural exhibition (and if so, how)? And how can one engage with a project that has so many offspring? Finally, the study of John Massey's *As the Hammer Strikes (A Partial Illustration)*

raises the question: how does one engage with an artwork that has known different states (a film version, a video version and a digital version) and therefore has, as Gérard Genette would qualify it, *plural immanences*?²¹ How do all the versions contribute to the shaping of its identity?

Sources

In order to reconstruct the life cycles of the editioned video and film installations studied in this dissertation, I have done mainly archival research. Indeed, as these artworks take different forms depending on the exhibition spaces and the contexts, consulting files and documents has enabled me to record the variations that occurred in their re-exhibitions. Whenever possible, and if granted the permission, I consulted exhibition files, curatorial files and conservation files. Through this material, I gained access not only to information on how these works have been exhibited (mainly through exhibition shots), but also to the acquisition contracts and descriptions of preservation interventions that have occurred in these artworks' life cycles. I also traveled to different venues to see exhibitions in which the studied artworks were displayed in order to experience them and to compare how they have been exhibited in different venues. My research led me to different institutions and collections, namely, the National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa), Hamburger Bahnhof (Berlin), the Museum of Modern Art (New York), Kunstmuseum (Wolfsburg), the Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam), Wiels (Brussels), the Goetz Collection (Munich) and DOX (Prague). Together with the files consulted, these visits helped me to describe for the readers how these artworks were behaving in the exhibition space. Through my descriptions and analysis, I aim to give the readers the impression that they were in the exhibition space, that they were witnesses of different moments and events occurring in the life cycle of these artworks.

In addition, I scrutinized exhibition reviews of all the exhibitions discussed in the dissertation to compare the descriptions, interpretations, and receptions of these artworks. I was interested in seeing how the discourse on these artworks had evolved over time. These exhibition reviews played a double role in the present study. First, they influenced the artworks' perception and thus contributed to shaping their identity. Second, they were a source of information, and their reading sometimes helped identify other mediators present in the life cycle of the artwork discussed.

²¹ Gérard Genette, *The Work of Art*, 163-210.

Dissertation Outline

The structure of this dissertation has been organized in order to show how the scripting process establishes the identity of editioned artworks. The dissertation has been divided into five chapters. The first chapter discusses three major phases occurring in the life cycle of editioned video and film installation (exhibition, distribution, preservation) and problematizes them. Since video and film installations are polymorph, ephemeral and can be shown in multiple places at the same time, I contend that to fully grasp what these artworks are and to identify the necessary conditions for their instantiations, the study of their socialization (their exhibition, distribution, and preservation) is required. The second chapter presents the theoretical and conceptual framework of the dissertation. In order to develop a dynamic approach that complements the current models, in order to engage with and study contemporary art exhibition, distribution and preservation discussed in the previous chapter, I had to adapt models and concepts from other disciplines (Actor-Network Theory, performance studies and the sociology of mediation). This enabled me to broaden the framework in which I would study these works and also to have the tools to identify the different mediators present in the life cycle of editioned artworks. In this chapter, I also compare different definitions of score and script, and propose my own definition of script and also justify the active theoretical standpoint and the methodology of this study: scripting artworks.

Chapters Three to Five are dedicated to case studies. In the third chapter, the central questions examined are: What happens to the other editions if one of them is modified? Are we still talking about the same work? How did the owners of the work deal with the alteration(s)? Who were the mediators that lead to the modifications of the artwork? What are the consequences on the artwork's script(s)? In order to address all these questions, the chapter takes Douglas Gordon's *Play Dead; Real Time* (2003) as an example since this artwork is variable in its physical manifestations.

Chapter Four examines the fragmentation of artworks and large-scale projects after their inaugural exhibition. It explores possible ways of scripting projects that produce a great variety of offspring. It also discusses how the different offspring continue (or do not continue) to relate to one another. In this chapter, the peculiar distribution of Mike Kelley's *Day Is Done* is studied in order to deal with these questions because the project comprises a substantial number of offspring that have been acquired by different institutions and private collections and have been re-exhibited a few times.

The fifth chapter investigates what we learn from the study of artworks which have had

different manifestations and have been through varied technical and material appearances. It also discussed the fact that a non-editioned artwork can become, at some point in its life cycle, an editioned artwork. To illustrate this point, in this last case study chapter, I examine John Massey's film installation *As the Hammer Strikes (A Partial Illustration)* (1982), since it became an editioned artwork about twenty years after its creation and consists of many versions.

In the conclusion, I outline the scripting process of editioned video and film installations in a more abstract sense, and explain how this theoretical tool serves the purpose of better understanding these artworks' socialization. I discuss how the method of *de-description* helps gain a better insight into how the identity of these artworks has evolved over time. Finally, I reflect on the benefits and the limits of my approach.