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

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Chapter 2

Scripting Edited Video and Film Installations

2.0 Introduction

In the preceding chapter, I analyzed the exhibition, distribution and preservation of editioned video and film installations. I contended that studying the different phases of the life cycle of these artworks helps determine their identity and the necessary conditions for their instantiations. As outlined in the introduction of this dissertation, video and film installations belong to what Gérard Genette, following Nelson Goodman, calls the allographic regime. Allographic artworks possess two modes of existence: an ideal immanence and a physical manifestation.¹ The ideal immanence is described in the notations accompanying the artwork. The interpretation, execution and/or performance of the notations lead to a physical manifestation. Since film and video-based artworks are re-exhibited, during their life cycle, they go through a series of different physical manifestations, all based on the interpretation of the notations accompanying them. As video and film installations are polymorph and have a variable nature, I contend that they need to be envisaged as continuums and they call for a dynamic model of analysis. Because these works are process-based, it also means that the notations that accompany them, what I call the artwork's script, also evolve. Therefore, I propose to develop a new approach – *scripting* – to deal with these works that have variable manifestations and plural immanences. Scripting is the conceptualization of what happens during the socialization process of artworks: how their identity is shaped by their respective exhibition, distribution and preservation histories. *De-scriptio* is the method used to put into words the socialization process; it is the act of retrieving the script, of putting into words what is not visible. By doing so, one can identify the mediators that make the existence of the work of art possible. To justify what led me to this theoretical and methodological standpoint, the present chapter aims to unfold the theoretical and conceptual influences of the dissertation and explain how certain approaches and concepts, from the fields of art history and the sociology of art to other fields such as Actor-Network-Theory and performance studies, have been adapted for the study of the life cycles and the socialization of editioned video and film installations.

The chapter begins with a discussion on the notations accompanying artworks since the 1960s. Definitions of terms such as sanctioning narratives, scores and scripts are compared, and this analysis leads me to propose the definition of script that will be used throughout the

¹ Gérard Genette, *The Work of Art: Immanence and Transcendence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 91. Philosopher Nelson Goodman was the first one to introduce these categories of autographic and allographic arts in *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1976). As the definition of these two regimes used in this dissertation as closer to the ones developed by Gérard Genette, I refer to this second author.

dissertation (2.1). In the second part of the chapter, I explain the conceptual standpoint of the dissertation: *scripting artworks*. This is followed by the description of the different steps of the research and the outline of the manner in which the case studies are apprehended (2.2). This second chapter aims to set the stage for the case studies discussed in the following chapters.

2.1 The Artwork's Script

Many artworks created since the 1960s, including video and film installations, are accompanied by various kinds of notations that need to be interpreted: statements, series of prescriptions on how to materialize and/or display the artwork, photographs, schemes, and certificates. Whereas music has been transmitted over centuries by means of a score, visual artworks such as video and film installations, made of different technical components that need to be assembled in the exhibition space, are nowadays sold with a floor plan and a set of instructions. These instructions, whose specifications vary from one artist to another, are either given by the artist or established by the acquiring institution in collaboration with the artist and/or other parties, such as the artist's art dealer and assistant(s). These notations are given different names in the literature, but are usually referred to as scores or scripts. This first section of the chapter aims to compare different notational models that accompany artworks by way of assessing their purposes, their strengths, and their limits. This discussion leads to my own definition of script, the one referred to throughout this dissertation. I will subsequently use the script as a methodological tool to study the socialization of video and film installations.

To speak of the statements that ensure the socialization of the artwork and its presence in the world, Jean-Marc Poinot has introduced the term sanctioning narratives [*récits autorisés*].² This term refers to the titles, signatures, dates, comments, declarations, illustrations' accompanying notes, certificates, installation instructions, reviews, descriptions, catalogues and catalogues raisonnés, and all other information diffused by the artist. They contribute to making the iconographic contract of the artwork explicit, which “constitutes a set of answers to the *raison d'être* of the artwork and its matter and, simultaneously, the history of its production and its apparition.”³ The task of the sanctioning narratives is to

² Jean-Marc Poinot, *Quand l'œuvre a lieu : L'art exposé et ses récits autorisés* (Geneva: Les presses du réel, 2008 [1999]), 40-41.

³ *Ibid.*, 217. [My translation.]

“propose keys and procedures to access the signification and the contents of the works.”⁴ By no means do the sanctioning narratives constitute the artworks themselves nor can they replace them.

Among the sanctioning narratives, Poinot does not establish a clear distinction between the artist’s statements on his/her œuvre from those of other parties. I advocate, however, that the artist’s statements cannot be considered as equivalent to others’ statements on his/her work. All statements ought to be considered and integrated in the script (or are part of what Poinot calls the sanctioning narratives), but some statements have more weight and authority than others. Indeed, even though the artwork is the result of a collective process, in the way it is dealt with in the actual art world and legal system, it is still perceived as the product of one author: the artist. The latter remains the figure of reference. This issue merits further explanation and will therefore be discussed below.

What Poinot refers to as the sanctioning narratives has been called the score or the script of the artwork by other authors. To discuss the notations accompanying a visual artwork, it appears that the word “score” has been adopted in the Anglophone literature, while “script” is the preferred term in the Francophone literature. For some authors, these words are used interchangeably; for others, there is a very clear distinction. Nelson Goodman is one of the authors for whom the distinction is important and relevant. He claims that a “score, whether or not ever used as a guide for a performance, has as a primary function the authoritative identification of a work from performance to performance.”⁵ In his view, rather than instructing musicians on how to perform the work, it is used to mark “off the performances that belong to the work from those that do not.”⁶ Goodman indicates a distinction between score and script by stating that the score is a character in a *notational system*, while the script is a character in a *notational scheme*, but not in a notational system.⁷ What distinguishes the notational system from the notational scheme is that to belong to the former, the characters must meet two syntactic requirements (disjointness and finite differentiation) and three semantic requirements (unambiguity, disjointness, and finite differentiation).⁸ In other words, the characters making the score are certain classes of utterances, inscriptions and marks, which can be interpreted, according to Goodman, without confusion. Each character has a single meaning, which, in principle, cannot lead to

⁴ *Ibid.*, 216. [My translation.]

⁵ Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 128.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, 178 and 199.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 156.

misinterpretations. On the other hand, the script being made of words, “is either ambiguous or lacks semantic disjointness or differentiation.”⁹ Indeed, each word can be interpreted differently, thus making it difficult to identify the work from performance to performance. According to Goodman’s definitions of score and script, the score would therefore be a more precise tool accompanying a work of art, as the information it contains is clearer than that which is carried in a script. However, describing a work of art without using words seems an impossible task. Moreover, one can also argue that symbols are not necessarily clearer than words, especially if someone is unfamiliar with their meaning. Goodman’s definitions work well in the field of music but are more problematic in the field of visual arts.

In comparison, French author Gérard Genette, who applied Goodman’s definition to works of art, defines “score” and “script” differently. Genette argues that the use of score is problematic, as it can have two meanings: “it sometimes designates the *notation* of a work in its ideality, and at other times denotes a physical, and by definition particular, copy of this ideal score.”¹⁰ As for the script, he defines it as “the verbal denotation of a non verbal object.”¹¹ The latter definition has been influential in my own definition of script, as one of the defining characteristics of the script of an artwork is a verbal description of it using a series of statements. Genette further explains that the script is an ideality and “it in fact only constitutes a potential manifestation which is in turn actualized only in real manifestations.”¹² The script is not the work, but it contains essential information that leads one to understand what the work consists of. Consequently, the script also acts as a guide for future iterations of the work.

Other definitions of score, such as the one proposed by philosopher Stephen Davies, are more suited than Goodman’s to be adapted in such a way as to adequately describe the notations accompanying a work of art. Defined by Davies, a score “is a musical notation the main purpose of which is to serve as a work prescription. It records a set of instructions, addressed to performers, the faithful execution of which generates an instance of the piece it specified.”¹³ Davies’s definition has been influential for my definition of script for two reasons. First, because of the prescriptive function that he gives to it. Second, because like musical works for performances, it is possible for video and film installations to be re-exhibited. Therefore, each exhibition generates a new instance of the artwork. This second

⁹ *Ibid.*, 201.

¹⁰ Gérard Genette, *The Work of Art*, 21n.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹² *Ibid.*, 130.

¹³ Stephen Davies, *Musical Works and Performances* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 100.

feature concords with Genette's idea that an artwork has several manifestations and that all of them contribute to defining it.

In the field of media art, more specifically, some scholars have chosen to use the term score rather than script. Richard Rinehart argues that the "reason that musical scores provide a useful model for media art notation is that they comprise the clearest type of description that compiles formalized (systematic) discrete elements into documents that aid in the re-performance or re-creation of works of art."¹⁴ Rinehart's choice to base a formal notation system for media art on the idea of score is explained by the fact that both music and media art have variable forms. Rinehart's conception of the score is certainly closer to Davies' definition than Goodman's as he contends that musical scores "also demonstrate how to navigate the border between prescription (maintaining the integrity of the work) and the variability that is inherent in media art."¹⁵ Whereas in the score described by Rinehart there is room left for interpretation, from Goodman's perspective, a "complete compliance with the score is the only requirement for a genuine instance of a work." According to him, "the most miserable performance without actual mistakes does count as such an instance, while the most brilliant performance with a single wrong note does not."¹⁶ In Goodman's terms, the notation system that Rinehart tries to implement is in fact closer to a script.

Another definition of the term script, this time used outside of the art field, is of interest for this study because it considers the relationships between an object and its users. In the field of the sociology of technique, sociologist and engineer Madeleine Akrich has argued that "like a film script, technical objects define a framework of action together with the actors and the space in which they are supposed to act."¹⁷ Prior to the release of a technical object in the world, its designer thinks of possible utilizations by users. What Akrich calls the "script" or the "scenario" of a technical object is the intended use implicitly inscribed in the technology's design. The technical object is also accompanied by *prescriptions* (notifications, contracts, recommendations, etc.).¹⁸ All these elements – the use, the manual, the designer's hand – are part of the script. To understand the interactions between the designer, the technical object and the user, Akrich proposes "to go back and forth continually between the designer and the user, between the designer's projected user and the real user, between *the world inscribed in*

¹⁴ Richard Rinehart, "A System of Formal Notation for Scoring Works of Digital and Variable Media Art," accessed July 4, 2011, <http://aic.stanford.edu/sg/emg/library/pdf/rinehart/Rinehart-EMG2004.pdf>.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 186.

¹⁷ Madeleine Akrich, "The De-Scripture of Technological Objects," in *Shaping Technology / Building Society. Studies in Sociotechnical Change*, ed. Wiebe E. Bijker and John Law (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 208.

¹⁸ Madeleine Akrich, "Comment décrire les objets techniques?," *Techniques et Culture* 9 (January-June 1987): 52.

the object and the world described by its displacement.”¹⁹ Performing this action is what Akrich calls *de-description*: “it is the inventory and analysis of the mechanisms that allow the relation between a form and a meaning constituted by and constitutive of the technical object to come into being.”²⁰

The notion of script as defined by Akrich cannot be directly transposed to the art world on account of the fact that artworks are created to be “used” differently than technical objects and also offer different kinds of experiences, one of them being aesthetic. Yet, the script as defined by Akrich is an interesting concept because of the dynamic feature that Akrich attributes to it, as one is encouraged to constantly go back in forth between the designer’s point of view and the user’s point of view and to acknowledge the kinds of variations that occur. Inspired by such an approach, one could, when studying what goes on in the art field, then go back and forth between the artist’s concept and the persons interpreting the work (curators, conservators, technicians, registrars, visitors, etc.). *De-scribing* here would mean identifying and analyzing the interactions taking place between the artistic creation (or art object), its creator, and other mediators interacting with it. In the end, the purpose of *de-description* “is to put on paper the text of what the various actors in the settings are doing to one another.”²¹ By writing these descriptions down, the script, first implicit and without a material appearance, would be given an existence through language.

For the translation of the use of script from the field of sociology of technique to the field of visual arts, I am indebted to the work of Julia Noordegraaf in her book *Strategies of Display: Museum Presentation in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Visual Culture*. In this publication, she analyzes the museum as script, which enables her “to retrieve the set of instructions for using and interpreting the displays, instructions that often remain implicit in museum presentations.”²² Noordegraaf’s contribution to the field of visual culture has helped me identify how the script could be a useful tool for my research. Nevertheless, since our objects of analysis were different – Noordegraaf studied museum presentation while I study the exhibition, distribution and preservation of variable media artworks – our respective use of the script is different. In her book, Noordegraaf identified a script that was dominant during a specific period of time. She studied four different historical periods and used the method of

¹⁹ Madeleine Akrich, “The De-Scripton,” 209. [Akrich’s emphasis.]

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Madeleine Akrich and Bruno Latour, “A Summary of a Convenient Vocabulary for the Semiotics of Human-Nonhuman Assemblies,” in *Shaping Technology / Building Society. Studies in Sociotechnical Change*, ed. Wiebe E. Bijker and John Law (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 259.

²² Julia Noordegraaf, *Strategies of Display: Museum Presentation in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Visual Culture* (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen and NAI Publishers, 2004), 249.

de-description to withdraw the scripts of these periods. She thus used the concept of script in relatively stable settings. In contrast, since my object of study was unstable, I needed a different conceptualization of the term script and I have used it in an active way, *scripting*, which I will elaborate further in the chapter.

The definition of script I use in my research elaborates on existing definitions used in different fields: Actor-Network-Theory, philosophy, literature, music studies and visual arts. I also chose to use the concept of script over the term score as my definition was mostly influenced by Madeleine Akrich's and Gérard Genette's definitions of script. Also, I find that the word score is quite often related to musical scores, whereas script is mainly linked to textual descriptions.

Building upon the definitions of script and score enunciated above, I state that the script of a variable media artwork is made of a combination of *sanctioning narratives*, as defined by Poinot (artist's statements, writings & interviews, press releases, reviews, etc.) and *prescriptions*, as defined by Madeleine Akrich (notices, contracts, advice, etc.). There is an overlap between these two concepts since Poinot would state that the notices and contracts are sanctioning narratives. Nevertheless, I contend that it is necessary to operate a distinction between what has been said on the artwork and the prescriptions leading to its materialization or its physical manifestations. Therefore, in this dissertation, when I use the term "sanctioning narratives," I refer to the titles, signatures, dates, comments, statements, declarations, certificates, reviews, and catalogues. When I use the term "prescriptions," I refer to installation instructions leading to the exhibition of the artwork. In addition, I propose to differentiate two types of prescriptions included in the script. There are first what Ivan Clouteau calls *prescriptions auctoriales*, which are the prescriptions of the artists.²³ Second, there are prescriptions that can be added to the first by other mediators who have interacted with the artwork. For instance, when an institution or collection acquires an artwork, its staff often adds specific remarks to the instruction booklet on how to install the work provided by the artist and gather as much information on the work as possible. For example, if the artist did not give any precision on which type of projectors to use to project the videos in the exhibition space, the audio-visual staff can write down which model has been used and for which reasons.

Contrary to the score of a musical piece or the script of a play, which exist in published form, the script of an artwork has to be understood as something abstract that does not

²³ Ivan Clouteau, "Activation des œuvres d'art contemporain et prescriptions auctoriales," *Culture et musées* 3, (September 2004): 23-43.

entirely manifest itself either in a material form or at a specific location. One of the major differences between the script of an artwork as I define it and the script of a play is the fact that in the latter case, the script exists prior to the performance, whereas in the case of an artwork, a portion of the script exists prior to the inaugural exhibition, but most of it will appear afterwards, as it is in constant evolution. For instance, the *prescriptions* – the indications on how to display the work in the exhibition space – are usually written down after the work has been exhibited a few times or when it is sold to an institution. Moreover, whereas the script of a play or the score of a musical work is, in most cases, the result of the work of one author or one composer, the script of a variable media artwork is the result of the work of a community of mediators. All mediators contribute to the scripting of the artwork. At some point in time, one mediator – a researcher – *de-scribes* the script in order to unfold it.

As stated above, the script includes, among other things, the artist's sanctioning narratives. In the introduction of this dissertation, I explained that Pip Laurenson states that the identity of time-based artworks is defined by a group of work-defining properties. Laurenson's work-defining properties are very much artist-centered and are in line with the strong insistence that has been put on the importance of capturing the artist's intent in recent literature on the preservation of contemporary art.²⁴ From a legal perspective, Julia Meuser argues in the same sense: "the basis of any reflection upon what constitutes an artwork – at least according to the traditional understanding of law, and the prevailing idea of art – must be the wishes of the artist."²⁵ Even if I do agree with these stances, I contend that to fully engage with artworks of a variable nature and with artworks in general, delving into the influences of other mediators can improve our understanding of these works. Moreover, there is also a difference between "the intention of the artist" and "what the artist has done." As artist Marcel Duchamp wrote in 1957:

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.*²⁶

²⁴ See, among others, IJsbrand Hummelen and Tatja Scholte, "Sharing Knowledge for the Conservation of Contemporary Art: Changing Roles in a Museum Without Walls?" in *Modern Art, New Museum*, ed. Ashok Roy and Perry Smith (London: The International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Work, 2004), 209-10 and Vivian van Saaze. *Doing Artworks: A Study into the Presentation and Conservation of Installation Artworks*. (PhD diss., Universiteit Maastricht, 2009), 48-51.

²⁵ Julia Meuser, "Copyright and the Integrity of the Work in Video Art," in *How Durable is Video Art? Contributions to Preservation and Restoration of the Audiovisual Works of Art* (Wolfsburg: Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, 1997), 77.

²⁶ Marcel Duchamp, "The Creative Act," *Artnews* 56, no. 3 (May 1957): 28. [My emphasis.]

Therefore, not only does the artist's intent have to be captured, but the discourse of the artwork itself must also be scrutinized. Within the script, the difference between the artist's intention and the artist's realization has to be pointed out.

A parallel can be made here with a fundamental principle that sociologist Bruno Latour sees as underlying all studies of science and technology: "the *force* with which a speaker makes a statement is never enough, *in the beginning*, to predict the path that the statement will follow. This path depends on what successive listeners do with the statement."²⁷ No matter how precisely the artist defines the artwork, by letting it out into the world, he/she can no longer completely control what happens to it. For this reason, it is crucial to analyze the intersecting events occurring in the life cycle of an artwork. Several "mediators" will interact with the artwork and leave traces in its script.

In my research, I use the term mediators in the sense given to it by researchers working in the field of Actor-Network-Theory. As Bruno Latour claims, mediators "transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning of the elements they are supposed to carry."²⁸ Mediators can be either human (for instance, the artist, the curator, the conservator, the technician, the art historian) or non-human (exhibition space, technology used to create the work, exhibition catalogue, etc.). The mediators contribute to the shaping of the identity of an artwork and they have an impact on its exhibition, distribution and preservation. As sociologist Antoine Hennion argues, to study how the mediators are bound and unbound helps conceptualize the artwork in a more global manner: the meaning of the artwork is studied, along with the history of its production, its circulation on the market, etc.²⁹

The script has to be recognized as a conceptual tool and should open up the interpretations and the reading of the work. Its aim is not to turn the artwork into something static. Even if the script includes a series of statements defining the identity of the work and prescriptions to guide future instantiations, the case studies of this study show that these statements and prescriptions are from time to time updated and redefined by mediators involved in the artwork's life cycle. The scripts of time-based artworks are, like the artworks themselves, processes or continuums; they do not have a permanent instantiation or format.

²⁷ Bruno Latour, "Technology is society made durable," in *A Sociology of Monsters: Essays on Power, Technology and Domination*, ed. John Law (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 104. [Latour's emphasis.]

²⁸ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 39.

²⁹ Antoine Hennion. *La passion musicale : Une sociologie de la médiation* (Paris: Éditions Métailié, 2007 [1993]).

Their purpose is not to counter the contingency of these variable artworks, but to acknowledge it.

2.2 Scripting Artworks

In order to avoid interpreting the script as a static conceptual tool, I suggest engaging with video and film installations from the perspective of *scripting*. Throughout the rest of this dissertation, I will be *describing* the scripting process that occurs during the life cycle of three editioned video and film installations. *De-scripting* an artwork is a process wherein the researcher – in the present work, myself – writes down descriptions of the work’s life cycle: how it has been exhibited, distributed, and preserved; in other words, how its socialization has evolved. It is a way to acknowledge all the mediators making its existence possible and a process that leads to more informed decisions when it comes time to exhibit, distribute and preserve works of art.

My active theoretical stance – scripting – has also been influenced by a new paradigm of documentation, “scoring the work,” articulated by information specialist Corina MacDonald. As she argues, “[d]ocumentation of variable media art must comprehensively consider the facets of container (infrastructure), content (experience) and context (knowledge). It must be responsive to the evolution of a work and its network of production.”³⁰ Whereas scoring the work is a new model of documentation for MacDonald, I propose *describing* the work as a process to seize its identity and the necessary conditions for time-based artwork’s instantiations. I also chose the term of scripting over documenting because to document means to support or accompany with documentation, which is a stance that is less analytically active than scripting. Indeed, when unfolding the scripting process of an artwork by means of *de-description*, one analyzes the roles of the mediators in the life cycle of an artwork. The *de-description* therefore involves not only the consultation of documents, but also their interpretation.

In order to understand the theoretical grounds of presentation, distribution, preservation and the close interrelations between these aspects in the case of (editioned) video and film installations, I use a framework that enables me to consider artworks as processes. The sociology of art, as defined by Howard S. Becker, offered me such a possibility, as it “focuses on how the work is made” and remade, “on the process by which it takes shape, on a step-by-

³⁰ Corina MacDonald, “Scoring the Work: Documenting Practice and Performance in Variable Media Art,” *Leonardo* 42, no. 1 (2009): 62.

step understanding on how the work came to the form it has when the analysis is undertaken (including an appreciation of all the various forms the work has taken and might yet take).³¹ To study artistic processes, Howard S. Becker, Robert R. Faulkner and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett state that one can look in two directions. Either there is a conventional agreement “that at a certain point the work has achieved its ‘final’ form,” which implies then the study of “the activities that led up to that moment as ‘upstream’ and those that follow as ‘downstream’ from that crucial moment,” or we recognize that the work keeps changing. The latter leads experts to consider that there is no such crucial point, but that “there are dozens or hundreds of such points, at which the form of the work is affected in consequential ways by the activities of the artist or others involved in its making.” This second direction invites analysts to choose any point in the process as a point of departure and “then to look into the past to see how the work got to this point or into the future beyond that point to see what happened to it after that.”³² It is this second direction that I take in my study since the artworks I have selected as case studies keep changing.

To study the life cycle of editioned video and film installations, I also broaden the previously described art sociology framework with some concepts from Actor-Network-Theory. At first, ANT was used to study the fabrication of scientific facts, but it has since been used to explain other kinds of social fabrications as well.³³ With this alternative method for studying the fabrication of scientific facts and technical artifacts, Bruno Latour advocates the need to follow scientists in their laboratories in order to fully understand how science is done. This is an anthropological approach in which one studies science in its making. By baring the mechanism of the scientific process, Latour intends to show that science is about processes and not only end products. ANT has been complementary to the sociology of art approach in my research since, as I pointed out at the end of section 2.1, ANT requires studying not only human mediators but also non-humans. An art sociology approach focuses greatly on human mediators, but as the case studies in the following chapters will make explicit, several non-human mediators also contribute to the shaping of the identity of

³¹ Howard S. Becker, “The Work Itself,” 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), 25.

³² 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), 10.

³³ The seminal book of this Bruno Latour, *Science in Action: How to follow scientists and engineers through society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), is one of the early publications in the field of ANT. ANT was developed at the Centre de Sociologie de l’Innovation (CSI) in Paris by sociologists and engineers Bruno Latour, Michel Callon, John Law, Madeleine Akrich and Antoine Hennion, among others.

artworks in crucial ways.³⁴ Adopting the ANT perspective therefore prevents me from focusing solely on human mediators.

The process-based nature of video and film installations calls for a description of the series of changes occurring in their life cycle rather than a focus on the achieved, materialized work of art. Video and film installations are never done; they need to be installed, uninstalled, preserved, upgraded to a more recent support when their current one becomes obsolete, and so forth. These artworks live through instantiations and each instantiation varies from the others. Whereas Latour chose to enter the science and technology world through the back door of science-in-the-making, this dissertation investigates *art-in-the-making* and more precisely, the necessary steps leading to an artwork's manifestation. A direct transposition from Latour's method of doing science-in-action would lead to the study of how an artwork has been created, therefore following artists in their studios or other places where they create their works. What I aim to do in my research is different because I am interested not only in the creation process of video and film installations, but even more in what happens to them once they start being exhibited, distributed and preserved. Having this emphasis means that I follow, describe and analyze artworks through their varied instantiations rather than following artists the way Latour follows scientists and engineers. In other words, I proceed backwards and study the different phases that video and film installations have been through.

In my manner of following the artworks I studied in this doctoral dissertation, I proceeded differently than Latour, and also differently than Vivian van Saaze in her doctoral research. Van Saaze has done fieldwork in contemporary art museums and has used ANT and ethnographic methods for the analysis of the presentation and conservation of installation artworks. As she states, the findings of her research were "mainly produced during several 'ethnographical moments' in selected museums" and during meetings of the research project *Inside Installations: Preservation and Presentation of Installation Art* (2004-2007). Within that project, she was a participant observer.³⁵ In contrast, I have worked in a different research setting, as I was not part of a research project and did not participate in meetings wherein the artworks I studied were being discussed. I have conducted what could be called *historical ethnography*, as I relied on documents, catalogues, and articles to reconstruct the life cycles of the artworks I studied, and identified the interactions that took

³⁴ Indeed, art sociologists argue that "art is not an individual product" and that "it takes a lot of people to make an artwork, not just the one usually credited with the result." See: Howard S. Becker, Robert R. Faulkner and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Editors' Introduction," 2.

³⁵ Vivian van Saaze, "Doing Artworks," 27. *Inside Installations: Preservation and Presentation of Installation Art* was a three-year research project supported by the Culture 2000 program of the European Union, accessed July 4, 2011, <http://www.inside-installations.org/home/index.php>.

place between the various mediators involved.³⁶ I have also traveled to the exhibition venues where the artworks I chose as case studies were on display to complement my findings based on the archival material. I traveled there to document them myself.

I can summarize my manner of proceeding as such: first, I came across artworks whose socialization puzzled me. Second, after identifying a set of key questions, I began reconstructing their life cycles. I tried to access as much documentation as possible on their exhibition, distribution and preservation histories. Third, over the course of the last four years, when these works were on display, I traveled to see the exhibitions in order to document their display myself. Fourth, I proceeded to analyze the various phases of their socialization and I have examined how the mediators involved in their life cycle have contributed to the shaping of their identity.

To study the life cycles of editioned artworks that have plural immanences, and to develop the concept of scripting, empirical research was the basis of this study. The following three chapters are each based on a case study. Each of them studies at length the exhibition, distribution and preservation of an editioned video or film installation. The case studies were selected in order to help understand the variable nature of editioned video and film installations and the necessary conditions for their instantiations.

Once the case studies were selected, I began their *de-description*. I first made a list of all their exhibitions (see Appendixes 1, 3, 4). Each work selected has been studied through the mediations that are the exhibition, the catalogue and the exhibition reviews. When possible, I traveled to different venues in order to see and experience the artworks I had selected as case studies. I also saw exhibitions including other works of these artists in order to compare how they have been exhibited and to be able to identify characteristics of these artists' exhibition practices. Art historians often study artworks and their displays through the means of photographic reproductions but it is quite difficult to do so with moving image artworks and other forms of contemporary art. I therefore share with art historian Suzanne Paquet, a Land Art specialist, the need to travel to see the works and to find my own "point of view."³⁷ Whereas Paquet has chosen to practice tourism (i.e., traveling to various isolated areas where artists have intervened on the landscape) as a methodological tool, I have made exhibition visits an integral part of my methodology. This enabled me to produce my own

³⁶ It is following the suggestion of Julia Noordegraaf that I use this concept of *historical ethnography*.

³⁷ Suzanne Paquet, *Le paysage façonné. Les territoires postindustriels, l'art et l'usage* (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2009), 207.

documentation of specific exhibitions and to compare it to other documents I used in my study.

Even though, for obvious reasons, I did not see any of the inaugural exhibitions of the artworks and projects I discuss in the following chapters, I did extensively research the circumstances of their apparition and the modalities of their inaugural exhibition. In all cases, my interpretation is based on first-hand observations if I managed to visit the exhibitions in which these works were presented, and otherwise on secondary material such as exhibition views, reviews, published interviews, curatorial and conservation files, etc. In this study, I did not conduct interviews because the main purpose of *de-description* is to reconstruct the network of relations in which the artworks' identity takes shape. Although interviews might be helpful for retrieving the intentions of human agents, they are not always necessary. These intentions also become apparent, perhaps even in a more objective way, from written statements or the actual manifestations of the works.

The experience of seeing the works exhibited allowed me to witness a number of changes that occurred in their life cycles, to document them and analyze the consequences. Many of the variations I have seen were not necessarily mentioned or explained either in the exhibition catalogues or in the exhibition reviews. These changes could have gone unnoticed if they had not been documented. During this period of exhibition visits, I wrote down many observations, took photographs and made sketches of how the works were displayed in the exhibition space. This enabled me to give specific examples when comparing the different displays. When possible, I also consulted the curatorial and conservation files of *Play Dead; Real Time*, the offspring of *Day is Done* and *As the Hammer Strikes (A Partial Illustration)*.³⁸ This latter step made it possible for me to analyze the type of auctorial prescriptions the artists provided to the institutions that acquired their works.

To study the socialization of editioned video and film installations, the model of scripting helped focus on aspects that I would not have otherwise seen. This dynamic approach prevented me from considering these artworks as “finished” objects. Since *de-description* is a method that implies the active involvement of the analyst, it necessarily implies a level of subjective interpretation. In this study, I am the one scripting, I am the one retrieving the scripts of *Play Dead; Real Time*, *Day Is Done* and *As the Hammer Strikes (A*

³⁸ Some institutions restrict the access to their files for a certain period of time. For instance, when I inquired in 2007 if I could consult the exhibition file of the exhibition *Douglas Gordon: Timeline* presented at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, I received the following answer: “As a matter of Museum policy, Registrar and Curatorial Exhibition Files are closed to researchers for 15 years following an exhibition.” (Email from MoMA Archives, May 31, 2007).

Partial Illustration). I am the one *describing*; I am using words to transpose the script of these works into the English language. By scripting the life cycle of the artwork, I also become one of the mediators involved in its life cycle. I am a mediator who studies the role of the other mediators. Since I am the one scripting, it also means that this interpretation is individual and that for anyone who applies this model of analysis, even if studying the same works, the results could vary.

2.3 Conclusion

The following case study chapters have each been developed in order to address a series of questions pertaining to key aspects of the life cycles of the selected artworks. The structure of the chapters was influenced by the life cycles of these artworks and the various events that contributed to the redefinition of their identity. In each case, I first study the inaugural exhibition (and surrounding circumstances) of these works. I then discuss the distribution of the works, their re-exhibitions, and finally, their preservation. While scripting the chosen artworks, I also identify the roles and influences of mediators involved in their life cycles.

In the third chapter, Douglas Gordon's *Play Dead; Real Time* (2003) serves as an example to demonstrate how the inaugural exhibition is crucial for the identity formation of artworks. In this chapter, it is mainly the exhibition phase of the socialization of this work that is analyzed since its re-exhibitions are what led to changes in its identity. In addition, this chapter shows that despite the fact that with editioned artworks, the "same" artwork can be seen in different venues at the same time, it does not mean that all these exhibitions of the work are exactly the same – the display of the work can vary, as can the number of components exhibited. In this chapter, the central questions examined are: what are the necessary conditions for the actualizations of *Play Dead; Real Time*? How many versions of the work exist? If one of its editions is modified, what happens to the other editions? 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?

Chapter Four examines the fragmentation of artworks and large-scale projects after their inaugural exhibition. Mike Kelley's *Day Is Done* is used as a case study because of the numerous offspring of the project. In this chapter, the complex distribution of *Day Is Done* is studied and some of the re-exhibitions of the offspring of the work are analyzed in order to see whether or not their framing continues to connect them to the large-scale project or not. This chapter also explores possible ways of scripting projects that produce a great variety of

offspring and discusses how the script of each offspring continue (or do not continue) to relate to the project's overall script. In this chapter, the central questions are: what is *Day Is Done* today? How did its distribution affect its identity? Which mediators have contributed to shape its identity?

The fifth chapter investigates what we learn from the study of artworks that have had different physical manifestations and have been through varied technical and material appearances. This chapter studies the life cycle of John Massey's film installation *As the Hammer Strikes (A Partial Illustration)* (1982) and focuses on the quest for finding the work a suitable exhibition format, since its initial support was inadequate for the presentation of the work. It also discusses the fact that a non-editioned artwork can become, at some point in its life cycle, an editioned artwork. The scripting of the life cycle of this work highlights its plural immanences and how the different versions of this work relate to and have influenced one another. In this chapter, the central questions are: what was *As the Hammer Strikes (A Partial Illustration)* in 1982 and what is it now? How many versions of the work exist? Who are the mediators that have been involved in its life cycle and how have they shaped its identity?

The *de-description* of the three case studies discussed in the following chapters will help illustrate how to study artworks as processes or continuums. Describing an artwork implies choosing a point of entry into its life cycle, an event that triggered the researcher's curiosity and led him/her to study the artwork and its socialization. This step is followed by the study of everything that led up to the event where we perceived the work as such and the study of what followed. It is studying the evolution of the identity of an artwork over time, since what it was back then is not what it is now. It also means that what the work is now is not what it will be in the future.