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### Documentation as a Creative Act

*Annet Dekker in Conversation with Matt Adams*

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## 5 Documentation as a creative act

*Annet Dekker in Conversation with Matt Adams*<sup>1</sup>

Since the early 1990s, the UK-based group Blast Theory has become renowned internationally as one of the most adventurous artist groups using interactive media, creating ground-breaking new forms of performance and interactive art that mix audiences across the Internet, live performance and digital broadcasting. While exploring interactivity by reflecting on the social and political aspects of technology, Blast Theory escapes genre classification as their projects move between, and sometimes merge, aspects of gaming, performance, theatre and mobile applications. As part of their practice, Blast Theory produces documentation during all cycles of their work, from the development and creation to its presentation and preservation. Frequently, these different forms and phases overlap, complicating the role and value of documentation. Central to their documentation practices is a desire to construct and communicate their artistic vision, as well as to ensure the possibility that each piece could be reconstructed in the future. In his presentation at *Transformation Digital Art*, Matt Adams, co-founder of Blast Theory, articulated the documentation challenges for Blast Theory (see Fig. 5.1).<sup>2</sup> While these challenges could be translated to practical guidelines, this interview explores how the group responded to them and what the conceptual underpinnings of their decisions were, as well as what consequences these may pose for a theoretical approach to documentation.

**What is the best documentation you've ever seen, and what are the specifics you look for in (doing) documentation?**

I think some of the greatest documentation can summarise the work in a very particular way, which may not have been what it really was, but it can make you feel as if you've been giving access to that world. For instance, I was a huge fan of Robert Wilson all through the 1980s and the 1990s, having never seen any piece of theatre by Robert Wilson, having only read books about *Einstein on the Beach* and all that sort of stuff. The only thing I saw were some photos. Basically, I read a description of the description of the description. That was my access point, and yet I considered him an influence, having never seen his work. Similarly, a lot of people say, 'Oh, I love Blast Theory's work. I wish I could see your work', without seeing this contradiction of only experiencing the documentation, either the videos, the photos, or me telling about some of it. So, there is the issue with performance art more generally that the documentation has that sense of standing

Documentation Challenges for Blast Theory's work

The work is live, interactive/participatory, digital, distributed (sometimes in mixed reality), durational

1. Performative work is time limited so opportunities to document are limited. (Restrictions of budget, personnel, lighting, technology)
2. In a participatory work, each person's experience is subjective, personal and usually private
3. Some elements of the experience are between participants
4. Privacy must be respected. Permission/consent must be granted.
5. The act of documentation changes the experience
6. Many ethical issues: capturing the public in ways they are not happy with. Or in activities that may look compromising out of context.
7. The work is challenging and ethically slippery: it invites people to inhabit problematic positions or experiment with their behaviour.




Figure 5.1 Matt Adams, 'A Pale Imitation and a Creative Act', at *Transformation Digital Art*, LIMA, 25 March 2021.

for the work. It's a transmission through time and ultimately, it becomes the work. In the end, documentation is absolutely massive, it's a huge consideration all of the time because how are you creating something now that will stand up in five or ten years from now?

To some degree, as an artist, it's an opportunity to try again to fully realise the work. You know, all works fall short of what you hope they will be and doing the documentation gives you another bite of the cherry, so you can tidy up some of the things that you've done. For instance, on 28 September 2019, we organised an interactive parade of light and sound in Philadelphia, commemorating the flu pandemic of 1918 and remembering the individuals who lost their lives and the health workers who put their own lives on the line in times of crisis. We documented the whole parade and in the edit I noticed a piece of fabric that was hanging down from the bottom of one of the objects. It should not have been there and so I've spent a lot of effort in hiding the fabric in the final edit. If we had more budget, we would have hired a digital artist to erase it. But since we don't, I've been reframing and dumping shots where it's visible. So, in an attempt to reach the highest point in terms of great documentation, we're doing quite pedestrian things as well. At the same time, it also shows that documentation is a creative act and you soon realise that any pretence of objectivity is false. Documentation is not about being objective.

### **What are the main challenges for you when you're making documentation?**

All our work is interactive and by its nature it is unfinished: the public completes the work and therefore the documentation – in some way – has to accommodate that sense of incompleteness. Moreover, our work is often durational and site-specific or site-dependent. Usually, a project takes place at various moments and multiple places. So, for the duration of the work, each individual has their own trajectory through the work. There might be a canonical trajectory design,

the classic route through the work, but, actually, the work is precisely interesting because so many people are not following this trajectory and they're in some way finding their own path.<sup>3</sup> The work is also inviting the public to speak, sometimes directly, sometimes metaphorically, and we then have to consider who has agency both within the work and how the work is created, and in terms of our documentation, how that is represented. These are all political questions and they form the broader philosophical challenges that we consider when thinking of doing documentation.

**For whom do you, or what are the reasons, for making documentation?**

In some sense, we're making it for people in the future. Yet, while making it for the future, I'm also making it for myself because it's a kind of summation of the work. Essentially, I ask myself, can I watch this in ten years' time and feel happy with what I'm looking at? In retrospect I can look back at some of the documentation we made and cringe. For example, there was a period when *Song 2* (1997) by Blur was very cool, and at the time not known by a lot of people, and we chose a part of it to go with a work called *Invisible Bullets* (1994–1997).<sup>4</sup> It was just before the song became a frat boy anthem and the soundtrack to multiple adverts. So, now it just looks a bit naff. But at the time, you know, we had recognised the thing that lots of other people very quickly also recognised – this is an amazingly euphoric piece of music.

There's also an element of making it for utilitarian reasons. Some of that is marketing: quite literally, introducing people to our work in a way that it functions as an advert to program our work for a festival or venue. In that sense documentation is an entry into the marketplace. And then there's documentation that is more educational and explanatory, for those who are interested to understand what it was. Mostly that is about giving enough information about the structural properties of the work to make it meaningful. A good example that brings out not only the needs but also the challenges of doing documentation was *Operation Black Antler* (2016).<sup>5</sup>

The project is an immersive theatre piece, and as a participant you are given a new identity as part of a small team; you are briefed and then sent into an undercover operation. You must meet, build empathy with and ultimately try to win the trust of someone whose political and moral views may be the polar opposite of your own. You go to a pub that is open to the public and inside that pub are actors playing members of a far-right group and the regular visitors of the pub. And the players need to interact with those members of the far-right group. We tried to document it at the premiere, and soon we realised that we could not have a camera in that room because the whole point is that it is an undercover operation. So, we decided to stage the documentation. We set up a number of scenes with members of the public in the pub. It was horrendous, it totally failed. We spent a lot of effort and it was a disaster. In 2019, it was performed again at Southbank Centre in London, and then we filmed with hidden cameras, and that worked – filming wise. However, when you look at the footage from, for example, inside the pub, all you see is a pub filled with people. One person is talking to another person and that's it. You don't know why they are talking to each other, who is a member of the

public, who is the actor, or who is someone who's not even involved in the work. Those aspects are very hard to get across. Essentially, we've been working on this documentation for over a year and we still haven't found a satisfactory solution to this explanatory problem.

Finally, I can't talk about documentation without mentioning the research aspect of our projects as a key part of the capturing and presentation of the work. These kinds of collaborations give us space and budget to make good documentation. For instance, we didn't have proper documentation of *Can You See Me Now* (2001),<sup>6</sup> a mixed reality game taking place in physical and online spaces. The project was a collaboration with the Mixed Reality Lab, University of Nottingham and a grant from the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council, which included about £4,000 for the documentation of the research, made it possible to film it in Tokyo a few years later. So, one of our constraints was that we needed to meet the requirements of the University. The financial conditions under which a work is made are crucial. There is a lot of denial and illusion around artistic creation, particularly about how the market and the economy are affecting the production of the work, including the documentation. So, in more complex interactive and immersive projects, documentation becomes a much more forbidding challenge than for works that are designed to be looked at from a distance or observed from a certain point of view. That to me is the big shift that's taking place in documentation: the sense that the subject's position through which to observe the work is so unstable or so heterogeneous that it becomes much more problematic to document.

**I often use the example of an early work *Kidnap* (1997),<sup>7</sup> in which you asked members of the public to be kidnapped and be under surveillance for 48 hours. Partly because of its topic as an early case of performative works that involves the tension between public and private, but also as an example of the importance of missing information, or 'how to enjoy the gaps' as videographer Becky Edmunds (2006) mentioned, and with whom you worked with. Clearly, I didn't experience *Kidnap*, nor have I talked with the ones involved, yet the documentation speaks to me vividly. You mentioned before how you see documentation as a process and how it is never objective. In a way, the intention of the work comes out through snippets and fragments of information, which allows viewers to form their own narrative about it, which happens with single photographs but also in edited video. Do you see yourself, and documentation for that matter, as forms of storytelling?**

Yes, and in that sense, *Kidnap* is really important in terms of documentation, because there was no audience to see that work, and no one has complete access to that work, not even I or Ju or Nick as the artists. The work took place over several weeks, running 24/7, and then the whole process around the two kidnaps themselves took place over 72 hours. While things were happening, quite literally, I was asleep during the work for significant chunks of it. I only heard about the events later. The nature of the work was that there were at least eight different kinds of audience (including, for example, entrants in the lottery, online viewers and viewers of the final documentation). The most important category for the

audience is the two people who were picked to be kidnapped, but even they only see their own experience. So, yes, documentation was a way of bringing together all the disparate elements of the work. Particularly since many of our works simply can't be captured in full.

I strongly believe that documentation should advertise its lack of fidelity, which is often why we use music that has nothing to do with the original work. You see this most clearly, I think, in *Ulrike And Eamon Compliant* (2013),<sup>8</sup> in which participants play the role of a terrorist as they walk through the city of Venice *en route* to an interrogation in a hidden room. For the documentation we used asynchronous sound, a chopped-up track by French Vietnamese Hip-Hop artist Onra. It deliberately has jump cuts, to move the viewer around in terms of where you are physically and in terms of time. In the documentation you follow one person 20 minutes into their experience and then you jump back to someone else starting their experience and then you jump forward again to the first person. These discontinuities in space and time are perhaps the most graphic demonstration of how we think about documentation of the work: these techniques are a creative engagement with the truth.

More than other forms, video allows you to emphasise the relational quality of the work; the relation between the performers and the members of the public; between the performers; and between different members of the public. Each occupies a different point of observation and engagement with the work. A photo can be a powerful 'summary', but it leaves so much unspoken. For example, from our first performance *Gunmen Kill Three* (1991),<sup>9</sup> we only have one photograph, a classic black and white image, reminiscent of much performance art photography (Fig. 5.2). In the performance, a member of the public is invited to shoot two performers with a paintball gun. The photo looks slightly scary and unnerving. It's not clear what is going on or who is who in the photo. The photo works well as it gives you an access point to something at work that is about violence and liveness, and as such it can become symbolic for the work, but it lacks a lot of contextual information. It's also one of the very few bits of documentation we have, simply because we couldn't afford a video camera.

Generally, our work is designed to be experienced over an hour or 90 minutes, even if the work itself is running for much longer. Video enables us to tell stories through the edit and therefore to build a picture over time. Rather than a purely linear form of storytelling which is generally boring when reproducing a performance, we want to create a narrative construction, even in works where there's no real narrative. For instance, in *Can You See Me Now* members of the public are often playing for a few minutes before they get caught and are knocked out, but often they will come straight back in and play again. So, their experience might take an hour. Within that time, they're doing many actions repetitively and those repeated actions are cumulative. Video then becomes an important tool not because it shows what it looks like visually, like in *Gunmen Kill Three*, but because it enables us to do something with the different relations that take place within a specific time and space.

Our documentation gives you a flavour of the experience. That's also why we often use music, because what we're trying to do is to think creatively, as



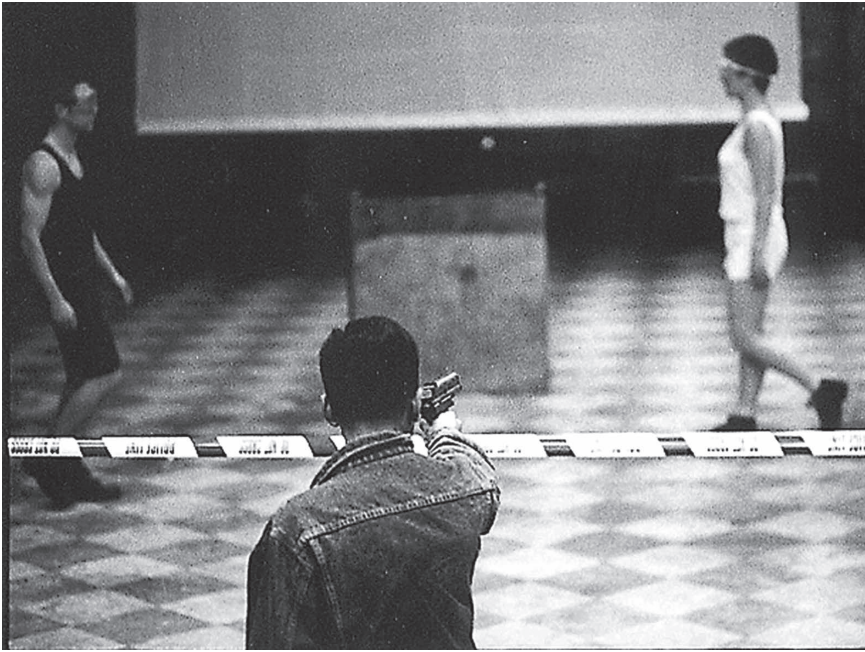


Figure 5.2 Blast Theory, *Gunmen Kill Three*, 1991.

filmmakers, about the experience. We are keen to play with the genre of documentation. Documentation has its own genre; it has its own clichés and conventions. For example, putting pop music onto documentation of performance was something that you should definitely not do. It would be seen as a kind of hyping, to jazz up something that should be treated soberly and with reverence. But to us, it is about choosing specific forms of subjectivity, and the need to be layered in our narrative. A primary driver for us is to create a sense of activity, of imaginative engagement with what it would have been like to be in the performance. So, the gaps you mentioned, are there to be filled with your own idealised version. You get a rough sense of what it looks like, and the rest is about your emotions and engagement. It's all about stimulating people around ideas and giving them an emotional experience to drive that.

**Currently there is an abundance of documentation, not only your own but members of the audience are also creating their documentation, sometimes as part of the game and other times of their experience being in the performance. What have you learned in the past years about documentation?**

I think the biggest change that happened in the last 10 years is that documentation is now happening everywhere all the time by other people, and you have to take that into consideration. It's not that long ago that museums would forbid photography inside their buildings, and you were not allowed to get your camera

out, and one by one, they have fallen because they realised that they cannot hold the line any longer, neither practically nor without refusing people to do the thing that they love to do. I often think of the *Infinity Mirror Rooms* (1965–present) by Yayoi Kusama. All the mirrored rooms look brilliant when photographed, it's the ultimate Instagram aesthetic experience. Yet it is a 360-degree experience, and although the 2D photo looks great it only gives you a small slice of it. In a sense the photo also commands, or at least lures you in to attend to experience the 3D environment. While such documentation fetishises the visual too readily, it's usually not easy to bring such different actions together.

The other change is that documentation happens in advance of the work being made and there is the pressure to publish documentation in advance. Our process has generally been to say almost nothing about our work until it launches and we have realised that you can't do that anymore. The audience's cultural appetites have shifted to the point where they want to be motivated to attend something by what they've already experienced before attending it. Experience begins from the first moment you ever hear about that work or that artist. It forced us to think about documentation as an active and ongoing access point.

At the same time, we connect to different disciplines, which all have their own modes of documentation. For example, the visual arts are often about obscurity, abstraction, a compression of visual communication; and theatre is more jazzy. These are different forms along the spectrum, and they also relate to how the industry behaves. In theatre it is about selling tickets to as large a number of visitors as possible, whereas in visual arts the economy is focused around a small group of collectors who have to believe that this is the most important thing going on in the world right now, which requires a totally different form.

So, we're also thinking about the changes and their consequences, but we just do not think in terms of single image production. It's rare that our projects actually have a key visual image that represents the work. In terms of the proliferation of documentation you have to consider how documentation operates on, or even influences, the work. The days that you could just ignore the camera are gone, you've got to accept that there will be people looking to take photos or videos of their experience, and that they're looking for the key image and moment of the work. If you want people to not be documenting, you have to be very clear what the codes are. It's something that we are thinking about carefully, partly because of the kind of dramaturgical significance of someone saying 'now I'm stepping outside of the work to capture something'. Once you pull your camera out and start to look through it, you are in a different position, a different relationship to the work: you are in an image production mode. If you can fold that into the experience that's another thing, but I think it's a line that needs to be navigated calmly.

**In what ways do you take into account the documentation that is made by the participants or visitors to your projects and exhibitions? Does it give you any insight into how the work is experienced or is there something you can learn from it?**

Sometimes we will look for the hashtag on social media and gather the photos that were taken by members of the public. In all of our interactive projects there



is a critical tension, and the point is that the audience has some degree of agency and that we invite them to be active within the work. We try to translate that into everything we do – even in exhibitions where we can only show documentation of our projects. For example, in our retrospective *You Start It* (2017)<sup>10</sup> at the Nam June Paik Art Center in Yongin in South Korea we showed some of our existing documentation, but we also created new documentation even in retrospect. For instance, we recreated *Jog Shuttler* (2012).<sup>11</sup> In the project nine TV monitors are attached to a VHS deck and you can mix VHS tapes from our documentation collection. Each of the VHS tapes shows a loop from a specific project, basically you're playing a little VJ/DJ game of putting in loops and mixing them in and out. In some way it is a disrespectful response to the Blast Theory archive, but it is more a work about making documentation interactive. Yet, it also shows how suddenly all forms of documentation essentially can become the work.

This was very clear in *The Thing I'll Be Doing For The Rest Of My Life* (2013),<sup>12</sup> a performance project that was part of the Aichi Triennial in Nagoya, Japan. The project was a response to the damage and the crisis in Japan after the tsunami in 2011. As part of the work a large crowd of volunteers pulled out a trawler from the sea. It was a two-day process of filming and taking photos and then in seven days, I edited a ten-minute film. During the Triennial visitors could walk around the trawler with tablets to watch the film, which was a compilation of moments from the performance set among a broader story of how people respond in moments of crisis. So, the documentation became part of the work, and you get a sense of how documentation of documentation of documentation is taking place. In this sense, the whole project showed the multiple nestings of different forms of documentation, and clearly, such multiplicities become increasingly complex to represent. To address this layering of documentation, in the exhibition at the Nam June Paik Center the curators decided to show the film that formed part of the original work and some of the photo documentation, both from the performance but also photos that we took during our research trip prior to the creation-phase of the project.

Another example of dealing with audiences and documentation is the project *Gift* (2019),<sup>13</sup> which is about expanding audience behaviour in relation to their documentation habits. As a museum visitor you are asked to take a photo of an object in the museum and then make a recording about the object, which becomes a gift to someone you love. We wanted to exert some control on the 'selfie narrative' by formalising the behaviour of people taking photos all the time in museums. It's an attempt to create an artistic language that provides a conduit for that activity and which takes people to places they wouldn't otherwise go, or to set a stage for them on which they can do something other than 'I was here' or 'I like this thing'. This connects with our own documentation practice in that it is playful, even disrespectful and consciously subjective. This comes back to how we think of documentation as an artistic practice, and more generally, how we refuse to create a safe observer position, we want participants to cross a threshold, to move into something unknown and perhaps even uncomfortable. A key part of our work is that the participants know they will be challenged and that they are up for it.

In a way, we are all involved in documentation, aren't we? At least in the sense of how capitalism is documentation when we talk about big data. *Karen* (2015)<sup>14</sup> is a good example of such multiplicity, or layering of these documentation processes. In 2013 and 2014, there was already quite a lot of discussion about Facebook's use of data, specifically how it was gathering personal data and misusing it. To me, what was interesting was that hardly anyone who used Facebook cared about this misuse of data. There was this solipsistic impulse of the machine knowing things about me. We wanted to make a project about the seduction of this piece of software that is algorithmically processing you, putting you in a bucket and adapting your experience based on the bucket's input. So, *Karen* is also about the proliferation of documentation that's completely out of control, and I wonder whether there will be a turning point, as there has been with social media, where suddenly people are like, oh, maybe I don't like this as much as I thought. Will there be an inflection point around documentation, when will there be too much documentation?

In a sense, the definition of documentation threatens to collapse as we extend it outwards to include social media, visitor photos/videos/audio recordings, chat logs within the work and then more humdrum data like website analytics (dwell times, country of origin, etc.). However, I think it is hard to draw a clear boundary that excludes any of those forms of record of a work. Ultimately the artist determines some of this: as an authorial choice about what is captured, what is attached to the work and what status it is accorded. For our work, which is participatory, the different ways in which the public pass through the work and act within it (and on it) raises this to a significant level. We record much of this because it helps us understand *what* the work is. As Brian Eno says, interactive work is unfinished. Audience participation is not just part of the work, it *is* the work. So, data is documentation. And it becomes a sprawling, sisyphian task to try to connect data with other forms of documentation into a coherent record. Even reviewing all the material is impossible. Ultimately data becomes a storytelling process: gleaning insight from data points and then assembling those into a linear narrative.

**There's also another side of documentation in relation to data, which relates to the ethics of surveillance and privacy. How have you dealt with these issues when documenting your projects?**

Indeed, privacy and data protection are today much more complicated than when we first started doing documentation, for instance with *Rider Spoke* (2007)<sup>15</sup> we only used a small paper form on a clipboard which people were asked to sign that said, 'I give you the right to use the recordings'. And that was the end of that. Looking back, we think, do we really have permission to use those recordings because the wording was very loose, it was not what today is considered to be a robust privacy policy. Did people really understand in 2007 that we could be putting that recording out to Instagram? Is that really what they consented to? It's a fine-grained question, and perhaps ethically, I think it may be acceptable, but legally, I'm not sure whether it would really hold up.

On the other hand, in some cases it is really difficult to document something. As I mentioned earlier with the example of *Operation Black Antler*, next to the

challenge of documenting that performance, it was also about the ethical question of using documentation out of context. Can we actually record and make public the things people said as part of a two-hour experience as a few seconds soundbite, as some of the things that were said were quite sensitive and could easily be misinterpreted. We've got to be really careful around these decisions.

It's almost impossible to get right, because most of our work is about discomfort. It's about putting you in a position where you're at the very least uncertain, because you're not sure what will happen next. You are not sure where you're going or you're not sure what the limits of this work are. In *Ulrike and Eamon Compliant* (2009), you adopt the role of a terrorist as you walk through the city of Venice *en route* to an interrogation in a hidden room. While you're walking around the city you wonder who is in on this? Who's that person that's looking at me, is that person taking a photo of me a tourist, or is Blast Theory documenting this project? It's the sense of the indeterminate boundary of the work which is inherently disconcerting.

We're recording people at a moment of discomfort. Obviously, artistically, we're specifically interested in these moments of discomfort. Those are the strongest moments. One of my great regrets in terms of documentation is that in recording *Ulrike and Eamon Compliant*, every person who came into the final interview room was asked about their ethics around violence and non-violence. We chose at the time not to record any of the conversations because we felt it was too intrusive and inappropriate, but some of the talks were truly amazing conversations.

I remember a conversation with someone who talked about having plans to murder his wife and then decided not to go through with it. And I don't know if it was true or not true. I don't know if he was playing a game or not playing a game. But I had a conversation in that room for six or eight minutes that was astonishing. All that is left are my memories. If we had asked for consent in advance, maybe it would have changed the work. Maybe that conversation would never have happened. So, the documentation itself is acting on the content of the work. Issues of consent are constantly present through the work. What level of expectation do I have of privacy here, right now, in this moment? I think a lot of time people could feel restricted in the way they can engage with a work that takes a few hours because they're not sure what's going on, and they may decide it best to say and do nothing, because they don't feel comfortable and are unsure whether or not they can trust the makers and the work. The question is always about trust and documentation is always part of that.

### **Concluding remarks by Annet Dekker**

In 2015, I organised the exhibition *Algorithmic Rubbish. Daring to Defy Misfortune* at Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam, including Blast Theory's project *Karen*.<sup>16</sup> However, *Karen* was an app to be installed on a mobile phone rather than to be exhibited in a gallery space. In consultation with Blast Theory, the trailer of the project was projected to convince people to download the app and participate in the project. While any form of documentation will fail the real-time experience

of such a project, Blast Theory shows how documentation can function in different ways: for instance, as illustration or explanation, a marketing device or for preservation. Yet, foremostly, they regard documentation as a creative act that has the capacity to fold back into new versions of the work or a new work altogether.<sup>17</sup> Characteristic of their documentation efforts is that in most of their projects liveness and documentation form an organic relationship.<sup>18</sup> For example, the live unfolding dialogue that happens in *Karen* depends on the production and instant use of what the software documents: the audience-generated input. This input is translated into textual, numerical and locative data, which is instantly logged into the database to influence the next phase in the project; or better, the next response in the dialogue. Moreover, the software juxtaposes the individual player's data with that of the other players, and thus *Karen* becomes a data compiler in which one person's data input is compared to the other players' input and after review is used to respond to the individual player. Likewise, the same could be said for their work *Rider Spoke* (2017) in which live data captured by and about the riders were analysed by Blast Theory after each performance and saved in what could both be described as a documentation and archive of the live work.<sup>19</sup> In both cases, the primary documentation propels the dialogue, which again is documented and interpreted: a cycle continues until the project is stopped. As Gabriella Giannachi and Steve Benford suggest in *Performing Mixed Reality*, documentation is both past and future oriented, both a canonic trajectory of a past experience and the point of origin of a new experience, constituting therefore an active ingredient of the live unfolding of the project. At the same time, it connects to other players' documentation and as such a new inter-documentary is generated, connecting, to speak in Briet's terms, primary, secondary and auxiliary values.<sup>20</sup>

While the final archive of *Karen*, and most of Blast Theory's other works, is formed out of multiple layers of documentation that are linked to the different phases of creation, presentation, and dissemination of the project, the main emphasis of the group is on audio-visual authored documentation. However, merely looking at the video as the remaining documentation, and thus valuing 'documentation as presentation',<sup>21</sup> disregards the variable connections between the different elements (hardware, software and participants) at play in the work. Moreover, it neglects the audience-generated documentation, which would 'offer a view from *within* the performance'.<sup>22</sup> Such 'inside documentation' is interesting to consider, because it demonstrates the activity of the individual player's experience and consequently it provides a means to understand how players engaged with and responded to the work – as well as potentially showing how changes in the local context in which and by whom the game is played affect the work. Simultaneously, it could allow players to gain more insight into their own experience and the affect the project had on them.<sup>23</sup> Such documentation 'from below'<sup>24</sup> and/or *from inside*, frames and provides 'the context of the function of the technological component of the performance piece',<sup>25</sup> and emphasises the engagement of the audience in the co-production of the work's unfolding and meaning.<sup>26</sup>

As mentioned by Adams, considering the documentation of such complex artworks in which the subject's position is unstable, heterogeneous, and shifting,

is increasingly difficult. An additional layer, or nesting, of documentation may come from articulating the value of audience-generated documentation as active contributors – both from inside the project or of the experience – to show different aspects of the work and open alternative ways into the experience and analysis of the work and its multiple creators. Although it may be the artists who in the end decide on what happens with the recorded data, the decision on what does and what does not belong as documentation will shift in time and likewise will depend on the context in which it may be viewed or (re)used. Whereas Blast Theory decided to see data as a storytelling process, in which the data points form a linear narrative, if audiences are understood as participants and co-creators of their own live experience, including taking active part in doing documentation, their activity must be recognised as co-producing viable documentation. Next to troubling the authorship of documentation, such expanded documentation practices will provide a further nexus of information that may influence how and by whom these complex artworks emerged, were experienced and are remembered.

## Notes

- 1 This interview was informed by, and builds on the respective analysis of the creation, use and value of documentation in Annet Dekker, *Collecting and Conserving Net Art. Moving Beyond Conventional Methods* (London: Routledge, 2018) and Zeta Kolokythopoulou, *Documenting Experience: The Practices and Challenges of Audience-Generated Content in Theatre and Performance Documentation* (PhD, London South Bank University, 2019).
- 2 *Transformation Digital Art* was a symposium organised by LIMA, Amsterdam to show and discuss existing and new strategies for the documentation, transmission, and preservation of digital art for and by artists, curators and conservators, 24–26 March 2021. For more information see, [www.li-ma.nl/lima/article/transformation-digital-art-2021](http://www.li-ma.nl/lima/article/transformation-digital-art-2021).
- 3 For more information about the idea of ‘trajectories’, see Steve Benford and Gabriella Giannachi, *Performing Mixed Reality* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2011), 229–67, which explains the trajectories framework.
- 4 [www.blasttheory.co.uk/projects/invisible-bullets/](http://www.blasttheory.co.uk/projects/invisible-bullets/).
- 5 [www.blasttheory.co.uk/projects/operation-black-antler/](http://www.blasttheory.co.uk/projects/operation-black-antler/).
- 6 [www.blasttheory.co.uk/projects/can-you-see-me-now/](http://www.blasttheory.co.uk/projects/can-you-see-me-now/).
- 7 [www.blasttheory.co.uk/projects/kidnap/](http://www.blasttheory.co.uk/projects/kidnap/).
- 8 [www.blasttheory.co.uk/projects/ulrike-and-eamon-compliant/](http://www.blasttheory.co.uk/projects/ulrike-and-eamon-compliant/).
- 9 [www.blasttheory.co.uk/projects/gunmen-kill-three/](http://www.blasttheory.co.uk/projects/gunmen-kill-three/).
- 10 [www.blasttheory.co.uk/projects/you-start-it/](http://www.blasttheory.co.uk/projects/you-start-it/).
- 11 [www.blasttheory.co.uk/projects/jog-shuttler/](http://www.blasttheory.co.uk/projects/jog-shuttler/).
- 12 [www.blasttheory.co.uk/projects/the-thing-ill-be-doing-for-the-rest-of-my-life/](http://www.blasttheory.co.uk/projects/the-thing-ill-be-doing-for-the-rest-of-my-life/).
- 13 [www.blasttheory.co.uk/projects/gift/](http://www.blasttheory.co.uk/projects/gift/).
- 14 [www.blasttheory.co.uk/projects/karen/](http://www.blasttheory.co.uk/projects/karen/).
- 15 [www.blasttheory.co.uk/projects/rider-spoke/](http://www.blasttheory.co.uk/projects/rider-spoke/).
- 16 [www.smba.nl/en/exhibitions/algorithmic-rubbish-daring-to-d/](http://www.smba.nl/en/exhibitions/algorithmic-rubbish-daring-to-d/).
- 17 Benford and Giannachi, *Performing Mixed Reality*.
- 18 Maria Chatzichristodoulou, “Exhibiting Performance, Staging Experience,” in *Performativity in the Gallery: Staging Interactive Encounters*, eds. Outi Remes, Laura MacCulloch, and Marika Leino (Bern: Peter Lang, 2014), 43–64: 58.
- 19 Benford and Giannachi, *Performing Mixed Reality*.

- 20 Suzanne Briet, *What Is Documentation? (Qu'est-ce que la documentation?)*, trans. and ed. by Ronald E. Day and Laurent Martinet with Hermina G.B. Anghelescu (Lanham, MC: Scarecrow Press, 2006 [1951]).
- 21 Dekker, *Collecting and Conserving Net Art*.
- 22 Kolokythopoulou, *Documenting Experience*, 225.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Ian M.J. Robertson, *Heritage from Below* (Furnham: Ashgate Publishers, 2012).
- 25 Kolokythopoulou, *Documenting Experience*, 206.
- 26 Ibid., 237.