

Conserving Interactivity: imai Case Study on Bill Seaman's *Exchange Fields*

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The authentic preservation of interactive installations and their appropriate re-installation are challenging because of the basic conflict between the preservation of the equipment and the preservation of the functionality of the installation. Here this conflict is discussed exemplarily for Bill Seaman's interactive video installation *Exchange Fields*. The installation was developed for the exhibition *vision.ruhr* at the *Zeche Zollern* in Dortmund 2000 (fig.1), and acquired by the *Museum Ostwall*, Dortmund. Only ten years later the museum staff had changed, so detailed knowledge about *Exchange Fields* got lost.



Fig. 1: First presentation of *Exchange Fields* at Zeche Zollern, Dortmund, 2000

In order to detect the parameters for future presentations of the work, the *imai – inter media art institute* (Düsseldorf) carried out a case study on *Exchange Fields* in cooperation with the *Cologne Institute of Conservation*

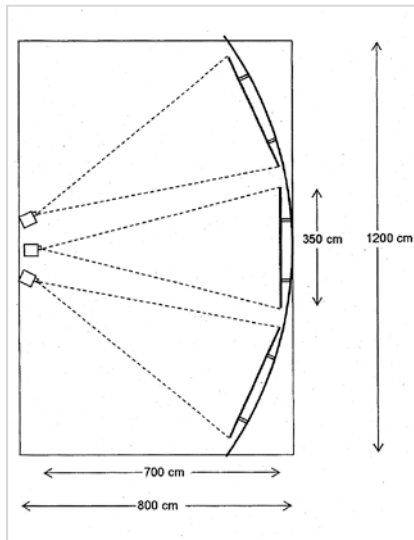


Fig. 2: Specifications of the projections



Fig. 3: Video still of one of the interactive dance videos

Sciences / University of Applied Sciences. The case study was supported by the State of North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany.

The installation consists of three projection screens (fig. 2) and thirteen interface objects. Each object is equipped with infrared sensors and is supposed to be used by visitors with a particular part of the body. By refracting the infrared sensors, the user triggers a dance sequence on the central screen (fig. 3) which is poetically related to the body part represented by the used object. Dependent on the number of users, up to four videos can be layered upon each other. These features enable interactivity between the user and the installation and among single users. The double-sided screens show energy related images accompanied by a techno ambient soundtrack and a poetic text read by Bill Seaman. They are played from DVDs. The interactive images on the central screen, which are accompanied by drones from a clarinet, are played from videodisks.

In the case study we looked for answers to the following questions:

1. Which aspects determine the authenticity of *Exchange Fields*?
2. What is the meaning of the original technical equipment for the work? May it be replaced?
3. Which are the parameters for the re-installation of the work?
4. How can the interactive properties of the work be catalogued?

An interview with Bill Seaman, the analysis of the contract of sale and of earlier presentations as well as additional research led to the conclusion that the authenticity of *Exchange Fields* is basically determined by the interactivity between moving images, interface sculptures and visitors. Additionally, the exhibition space, the projections and the arrangement of the interface sculptures play a decisive role. The appearance of technical equipment (players, computer, mixer...) is not important for the aesthetic of the work, because

the devices are not visible to the viewer. However, their properties (reaction time of the system, brightness of the projectors etc.) play a decisive role for the effect of the installation. The installation specifications and the minimum requirements for the exhibition space could be determined through a test re-installation of *Exchange Fields* at the *Museum Ostwall* Dortmund in 2009.

By documenting *Exchange Fields* and its interactivity the lack of a detailed documentation model for capturing the interactive properties of installations became evident. The elaboration of such a model is quite challenging. In the framework of the case study, a first step in this direction was made. Cooperation with a broader range of scholars would be desirable to accomplish this ambitious project.