TRANSCRIPT OF THE ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION HELD AT THE NeCCAR MEETING 'CULTURES OF CONSERVATION' ON 18 MAY 2012, PALAZZO REALE, MILAN

NeCCAR (Network for Conservation of Contemporary Art Research) is an international collaborative network of researchers and conservation professionals initiated by the Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences, Maastricht University and funded by The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO). Partners are Maastricht University; Faculty of Humanities, University of Amsterdam; Museo del Novecento, Milan; Triennale Design Museum of Milan; Pisa University; Università degli Studi della Tuscia di Viterbo; Instituto de História da Arte (IHA), Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Faculdade de Ciências e Tecnologia, Universidade Nova de Lisboa; Faculdade de Belas Artes, Universidade do Porto; Cologne Institute of Conservation Sciences; Royal Academy of Arts London; School of Culture & Creative Arts (SCCA), University of Glasgow, and Tate.
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The first NeCCAR meeting 'Cultures of Conservation' was held on 17-18 May 2012 and was organised and hosted by the Museo del Novecento in Milan. On the second day of the meeting Marina Pugliese of the Museo del Novecento hosted the round table discussion in collaboration with Barbara Ferriani, Università di Venezia, Triennale Design Museum, Milan, a renowned Italian conservator who lectures at both l'Università Statale di Milano and l'Università di Cà Foscari in Venice, as well as coordinating her own studio and the conservation laboratory of the Triennale Design Museum.

The round table took place at the Palazzo Reale and consisted of a panel of Italian professionals working in the field of conservation, including:

- Mariano Boggia from the Fondazione Merz, Turin
- Roberto Dipasquale from the Società Attitudine Forma, Turin
- Antonio Rava from the Società Rava & C. Srl, Turin, a protagonist in the Italian sphere of conservation
- Paolo Rosa from Studio Azzurro Produzioni S.r.l in Milan, a pioneering group working in the production of multimedia art

NeCCAR members were present in the audience and the aim of the discussion was to shed more light on the most crucial aspects of the research and training involved and problems encountered in the conservation of contemporary art - set within the Italian context. After a brief introduction by Marina Pugliese and the NeCCAR coordinators Renée van de Vall and Vivian van Saaze (both Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Maastricht University) the round table discussion commenced. What follows is a full translation of the discussion.

Transcript, 18 May 2012

Marina Pugliese, Museo del Novecento, Milan: I would like to hand over to our guests and introduce today's focus points: I think that it is implicit that the first person to be introduced is Antonio Rava, and to ask him if, in his opinion, the specificity of the training of conservators of contemporary art in Italy – considering Italy's traditional context in art history and sociology in general – has a real impact on our intervention methodology.

Antonio Rava, Società Rava & C. Srl, Turin: In the Seventies, the concept of restoring contemporary art was still unheard of in Italy, however, when I went to the United States during this time I discovered a reality that was already markedly developed, in as much as a sort of programme aimed at saving contemporary art from the risks of the modern era was already being established. This programme for contemporary art was set in place because it was thought that these works were subject to more stress than older artworks given their continuous transport and movement between international exhibitions. The highest risk was resolved through a theory of maximum safety that saw works on canvas mounted on metal supports made of titanium alloy, as this material was considered to be indestructible and would therefore guarantee the works' longevity. This approach soon clashed with the ethics and theory of restoration, which denounce any modifications to the formal and expressive characteristics of the work. Soon works mounted on metal supports were removed from these structures with great effort and difficulty and returned to their condition of fragile objects to be preserved carefully and with due attention to the prevention of any further damage.

This is a premise for what Italy has been able to achieve in the field of restoring contemporary artworks. In my opinion, Italy's vocation is based on a far more theoretical approach, an approach that goes back to even the most distant origins in the evolution of an idea, and that could provide many answers in the field of contemporary art.

Recently, Paolo Cremonesi – in what I believe to be both an ironic and interesting phrase – said: "We have to stop brandishing Brandi", in other words, we have to stop using Brandi's book as a model for intervention in all areas that touch on art, especially seeing as contemporary art often seems to flee from the need for historicized regulation and age-old superimposed theories on intervention. However, I am convinced that by using what is applicable, our Italian theory is essential to the development of concepts in the restoration of contemporary art. We have many examples, and are slowly building up a series of case studies in the hope that we can come up with something which is better defined, which can then be shared on an international level.

I do not want to launch myself into the pros and cons of the application of Brandi's theory, but I still believe that it is the foundation on which all of our thinking is based, and on which we can continue to build and develop our notions in the face of new problems. Such problems have already been raised several times, all around the world, for example, the Nara Conference on authenticity provided the opportunity for a confrontation between the East and the West that had never been seen before. We used to think that Oriental thinking differed radically from ours and was therefore not compatible, as if it were a simple clash between civilizations or an impossible dialogue, but in the contemporary world we are seeing that the possibility of applying oriental concepts to restoration is both fruitful and interesting.

In the contemporary art world we often need to replace perishable items in works that in the absence of such an intervention would lose their expressiveness. While this type of intervention does not exist in the Western tradition, in any type of industry or in any previously documented situation, it does resemble the oriental approach to the preservation or documentation of the original idea that, through a highly sophisticated technical ability elevates the operator to the same level as a living work of art – as someone who has the ability to constantly reproduce the artistic expression.

The most significant is what artists ask us to do: not only are we asked to replace mass produced or serial elements – that can originate either in industry or in nature – with which an artist has done nothing but impose his or her artistic will through the choice of a specific material, but we are also told that there must be specific people to perform this task because it is a highly skilled job that must be done with great caution and particular attention to the artist's expressive concept. The artist then says – and here I think of Sol Lewitt's writings on this issue – that it is fine to reproduce, in fact he even codifies and proposes this solution, but it must done by capable individuals elected by the artist, otherwise the result will not be recognised as the artist's work. Here lies the crux of teaching: this *imprimatur*, this chrism of possibilities to intervene on contemporary art as it is handed down. Who can take on this responsibility? Who is to be considered as the beacon of authority, autonomy and legality in any given intervention?

Often it is experience that leads to the identification of a possible intervention, or constant contact with an artist that leads to a habitual relationship and the formulation of rules that define plausible interventions, but can we teach students this relationship with artists, this practice, or how to immerse themselves in this train of thought in order to be true and above all respectful to the artist's concept? This is a complex issue that we are constantly trying to unravel, and in Italy proposals and innovations continue to be put forward.

The master's course launched by the Opicificio delle Pietre Dure a year or so ago, which ended a few days ago, is a good example of how, by using the tools that we already have, our highly stratified experience here in Italy can lead to excellent results. Indeed, we are able to interpret artworks in a refined and cultured manner and this approach can also be used in relation to the contemporary. I think it would be easy for some of the more important and prestigious institutions to take this matter in hand and build a series of courses around this theme that could be open to all, that could guarantee that all conservators can become conservators of contemporary art, but it is not clear whether the demand is large enough to guarantee jobs for all.

What is important is to maintain a high level and the type of intensification in what we are trying to convey. For restorers like me, whose professional experience comes from active work in the field –encounters and debates with artists, different contexts and galleries –our aim is to pass on this experience in the hope that we can make the restoration of the contemporary accessible and seem less trivial. Our work will never be something that is done in a hurry in order to cover accidental damage; our work has another vocation, to ensure a future for each work, and think of all the variables that could prejudice its longevity.

If collectors, galleries and museums realised how many possibilities this new science entails, they would restore much more contemporary art than they do today. Instead, the widespread view of conservation as the simple act of fixing something that has been broken underestimates the importance of this field, because even a minimal intervention - and there are some things that were already said twenty or thirty years ago - provides the knowledge and great theoretical insights.

One must not even consider minor maintenance to a work by people who have only just heard about this sector of conservation, any intervention must be thought through carefully and in great detail. In conclusion, I hope to see many changes and much growth in the field of restoring contemporary art in Italy, a sector that has taken on a new life through the many focused and interesting debates heard at the conventions of the Italian IIC group, but that has not yet become structured enough

to resolve the problem of lacking coordination and facilitate the possibility of real growth.

Marina Pugliese, Museo del Novecento, Milan: Antonio Rava spoke of a way of interpreting work in the sophisticated cultural context of Italian tradition and the important role that institutions play in carrying this tradition forward so that we do not run the risk of reckless improvisation. Antonio mentioned the masters course organized by the Opificio delle Pietre Dure, coordinated by Mattia Patti, a member of NeCCAR. I now ask Mattia if he can relate to Antonio Rava's statements and to what degree he thinks that the recently concluded master's course on the conservation of contemporary art succeeded in passing on our cultured and sophisticated approach to the interpretation of the artwork.

Mattia Patti, University of Pisa: The experience of this one-year masters course - which aimed to bring many themes in the conservation restoration together through a series of different figures, including: restorers (many of whom are graduates of the Opificio delle Pietre Dure or the Central Institute of Restoration); art historians (some of which have backgrounds in doctoral research on the history of restoration); architects and students who have mixed training in restoration and chemical science – has meant that the Opificio's training system, together with that of the ISCR, has become a national focal point in the field of conservation education, and an ongoing experience that continually adds to the system that Rava defined as a culture of sophisticated excellence. I think the situation is changing and I am convinced that this is the way to go, but it will be necessary in the future to think of a strong integration plan that also addresses the basic training of restorers and a new area of specialisation in the field of contemporary art. I think it's important to find a new dialogue with universities and areas of research – including historical, artistic and scientific fields – that does not evaporate into improvisations, and which can strongly contribute to the context of restoration conservation. I agree with Rava but I think there is the need to break or rather, to make the relationship between the different specialisations that have hitherto characterized the Italian training situation more flexible.

Barbara Feriani, Università di Venezia, Triennale Design Museum, Milan: Perhaps we should also discuss whether the formation of a restorer of contemporary art is the same as that which we have always provided or not. Clearly contemporary art foresees the conservation and knowledge of completely different media. So, is it better to have specific training that goes to create highly specialised professionals (video restorers, plastic restorers, etc.) or should one consider another path that gives operators a well-rounded education so that they are able to identify different operators according to their specific needs? Antonio Rava also stressed the need for large institutions to provide adequate training, and although I agree, I feel that new fields of expertise must still be added and these institutions must begin to cooperate with each other.

Antonio Rava, Società Rava & C. Srl, Turin: The thing that appeared most extraordinary to me during the experience at the Opificio is the involvement of the restorers and teachers with longstanding experience in the field of ancient and traditional art in the field of contemporary art. This comparative experience was extraordinary because for many it was the first time that the participants were exposed to new interpretations, for which however they were well prepared to answer. This wealth of tradition was very important and I found it to be very fruitful. One immediately made the jump and began to understand how to intervene on innovative situations – and from this point I continue to maintain that our cultural baggage is not only important, it is necessary.

Marina Pugliese, Museo del Novecento, Milan: The theme that we have just touched on is what Paolo Rosa of Studio Azzurro deals with. Talking about the training of conservators in Italy and the Italian tradition with respect to conservation, Barbara Ferriani introduced the topic of specialisation and whether it is better to train professionals with wide-ranging capacities who can be further assisted by skilled technicians, or whether it is more correct to build up a specific, high degree of specialisation in the various and complex fields involved in the restoration of contemporary art. Within this group it is clear that the conservation of new media is one of the most particular fields and involves the collaboration of people with different skills and specialisations. I ask you, as an artist whose works from Studio Azzurro are found in many museums (one of which will soon enter the collection of the Museo del Novecento, but, given that it is a work from the early Eighties, we still have to resolve conservation problems related to the monitor and formats) what your personal experience is and what is your point of view on the debate as to whether it is better to split and segment our knowledge between individuals specialised in specific fields or whether it is better to work with a specialist who has a more complete all-round training that could even include studies in the humanities.

Paolo Rosa, Studio Azzurro Produzioni S.r.l., Milan: Having experienced this problem from the point of view of both the direct experience of the conservation of a work and from the perspective of a reflection on the status of this work or rather, on its physical matter and the consistency of its material aspect because it is necessary to have something to restore, one could identify two factors:

From a specifically technical point of view, one could say that it is obvious that there are very precise conservation factors linked to the constituent elements of those works that we call "immaterial works" whose raw material is stored in tapes and data, and which therefore do not have a physical object. The conservation of this data can and should have a specialisation because it requires a very specific technique that does not only belong to the tradition of conservation in the strictest sense and therefore involves many technical elements.

On the other hand, it is essential to have a humanistic, art historical or even an anthropological approach. Dealing with works that are more prone to disappearance than to appearance, I am a supporter of the disappearance of a work when it is no longer "alive". I think that it is fair that in this era artists start to pose the problem of how to get rid of things, to storing them in their invisible form rather than constantly extracting them from this space in order to reproduce them as the centre of attention, in terms of their presence, and the physical volume of the same. We are, for various reasons, entering an era "of elimination" and I think that the artist should assume an ability to make things that can then be disposed of, things that do not encumber store rooms, museums and squares, but that set an example that this world should be reconsidered from the point of view of elimination and not only from that of addition.

In this sense, the nature of these intangible works helps us because it is immaterial, and therefore does not necessarily require a physical condition in order to express and manifest itself. Considering this characteristic, you can imagine that the immateriality of these works can also help to make them disappearance and not necessarily persist. This position is to be held for two reasons: one that is a speculative and philosophical vision of a world that tends to reduce the presence of man-made objects and emphasise the reappearance of the natural, but, on the other side of the coin, these works rely on interactive devices which provide a rather original aspect when seen from the aesthetic point of view – that of their relationship

with the public. Given that these works have a great relational impact on society one must preserve the "relationship patina" that they assume into their beings. In fact, these works only have meaning if we go beyond their formal and physical aspects; if one can appreciate what they offer through their gestural dimension, their interventions, and the desires that are expressed by their relationship with the public.

The conservation of this "relationship patina" is essential, and is linked closely to the field of anthropology in that, to some extent, these works reproduce a ritual dimension. Here it would be nice to make a small digression on the origins of art and what ritual values could be contained in the original event of manufacturing an item that is enriched by the participation of the shape and identity of a community and it's reciprocal representation of this identity.

If we keep this in mind we put ourselves into a very difficult position: a restorer is that person who with respect to these works, at some point in their life and their process, acts on the process of disappearance (which may be perennial for a work that is not periodically invoked into life and can therefore disappear permanently without anyone regretting its disappearance), or vice versa, if the motivation to intervene stems from the fact that during the work's early existence it received a powerful public response and is therefore still bound to the public through its memory, consequentially comes the desire to reposition it, to move it from the state of invisibility to the visible. In this case there are issues concerning not only the conservation of the work's matter but also of preserving its relational qualities, which require a far greater degree of specialisation in both the humanistic dimension in its broadest sense, and the anthropological world.

While you can dig out and re-present the work in such a way as to evoke its potential, its '"aura" – which I like to call its "patina" – and present it again in a way that not only refers to the aesthetics of form and matter, but also pertains to aesthetics and relational character that take into account the nature and extent of the gestures that were born around it, how much data (also in the sense of computer data) have transformed it – so that it can be re-presented through its transformation – and the conditions that must be generated because the work must now confront a new relational dimension. This is an issue that may seem very abstract, but I am raising it as I feel it is worth considering how this phenomenon could evolve in coming years. These are aspects that we are experiencing now and are therefore not far-fetched notions, and I think of what could be potentially serious problems for the person who has the thankless task of exhuming these values.

Marina Pugliese, Museo del Novecento, Milan: I thank Paolo Rosa for his contribution, which was particularly interesting because he raised many key themes addressed in the NeCCAR presentations yesterday and the debate behind closed doors. I think of the coordinators and promoters of NeCCAR, Renée van de Vall and Vivian van Saaze, who work in The Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Maastricht, a pioneer in interdisciplinary discourse – in fact, Renée was trained as a philosopher. One of the debates that we brought to the discussion yesterday was how and if the conservation of contemporary art should be open to disciplines that are not strictly connected to art history, the disciplines of conservation science or chemistry – for example: anthropology.

Iolanda Ratti, Tate: With regard to training in the field of new media, I have noticed a persistent inferiority complex in relation to the technical capacities of the conservator, who is neither an engineer nor an editor, an experienced audio-video technician or an archivist, and it is thus difficult to relate and communicate to these fields. In my experience at the Tate I learned, amongst other things, the importance

of the theoretical component. I thought that, as Paolo Rosa pointed out, it was important to know how to relate to the technical element – to know what to ask, how to communicate and the real nature of the object in hand – but I also realised that there is a distinct synergy between different technicians and operators involved. The computer or the programmer and curator-historian with a more theoretical grounds are all treasured resources, but paradoxically, I learned this where I expected to learn from a far more technically oriented point of view.

Filippo Di Giovanni, Attitudine Forma, Turin: I find the idea of the work's disappearance very interesting because we already have examples of contemporary art which are hardly spoken of, namely those of performance works – for which we must ask ourselves what should remain and what must be kept. Recent works by Marina Abramovic, in which she returns to memories of past performances, but each performance is something different.

For Pier Paolo Calzolari, in New York, we re-produced a performance from the Seventies: *La donna colonna* (The woman column) that as its protagonist sees a woman who hangs from a six feet tall column, wearing a skirt that touches the floor. The environment and the idea that the artist instructs me to recreate as it was at the end of the Seventies is a preservation of memory as long as the work continues to exist for the artist. Calzolari gave instructions that allowed me perceive what had to be done in relation to the public, especially since the work related to the control of space.

I am convinced that this field of expertise is related to knowledge, including knowledge of the humanities, which we need to look into much more deeply. Ephemeral beings form part of the contemporary art world and even if the restorers may encounter many problems, those who work with pieces of this kind know that they are strong and consistent, and form the basis of all that which keeps us going.

Barbara Feriani, Università di Venezia, Triennale Design Museum, Milan: This last part of the discussion made my heart jump and I would like to take advantage of the presence of Paolo Rosa to discuss other issues raised in the debates yesterday, which also involved both theoretical and practical aspects. How can we ensure that our heritage is passed onto future generations? In relation to new media in particular, we have seen that there are some centres of excellence which study this element, like the Tate, but the information in this first phase of research does not always become common knowledge and therefore what is done at the Tate is not done at the Venice Biennale and we do not even know where to start.

Many formats are obsolete and some equipment from the 1980s no longer functions or we cannot find the spare parts. If desired, and if it is possible to preserve, we are confronted with the problem of translation of new formats. Studio Azzurro, with respect to this, when it is decided that a work should come back to life and reappear, it will need someone technical to do this, is this a problem that you have faced? Yesterday we proposed the creation of information "tanks" that can be used both to collect, store and distribute data, which would be useful for everyone. So, for example, if the Tate discovers that a format no longer functions or is close to becoming obsolete and identifies a new format that could be used, they would be able to inform other institutions that deal with this format.

Paolo Rosa, Studio Azzurro Produzioni S.r.l., Milan: Here I would like to address the work cited by Marina Pugliese earlier - *Il Nuotatore* (The Swimmer). As a work dating to the early 1980s and therefore created using a technical format that could appear to be quite archaic today, it is clear that it becomes impossible to re-present it in the

same way. It is impossible because this would mean that every piece of the equipment, spare parts and magnetic tape would have to be perfectly preserved. In fact, this work has reappeared several times during its lifetime as we have shown it on many occasions at many events; it has gradually transformed and thus we must consider it as a living organism, even though it is a technical body, and therefore it changes, ages and is simultaneously renewed.

If, initially we used a battery of twelve u-matics which were synchronised by a caretaker, who went to push the button every hour so that at the point where there was a white frame he could put them back in sync for another hour, later this became the task of a machine capable of regulating automatic synchronization. The caretaker who had had this task at the first exhibition at Palazzo Fortuny was therefore no longer necessary. In successive exhibitions we used not only the automated synchronization system, but we put it in the same "box" in which this *player* was produced or rather, from where images came from, at first detached, with the first video disc and then directly in digital format. In this transformation we lose: we must give up a certain quality that comes with the date of the man-made machinery that supports the work, however the relocation and the reappearance of the work doesn't bother me as much as the environment that hosts this work, in that it must satisfy the right characteristics to be able to bring the work back into a reality that has all the implications that we imagined from the very beginning.

We are talking about a work that all-in-all is quite a simple work and could be defined as video art, everything that happened between the early 1980s and the millennium, was an extraordinary development in terms of the paradigm of contemplating art, in that it no longer reduces it to an object. These works are not only installations with a physical boundary, but rather works that present a participatory character in a highly relational dimension and therefore a work with a vision that is no longer static but dynamic in its relationship with public. At some point the artist is only the initiator of a process, not the one who, by adding his signature, says that this is the absolute work and sets it before the public.

Today this condition has almost been reversed in that the artist is he who starts a process that, over its course, is shared with many other people who do not necessarily follow the direction he imagined. This change is interesting in terms of the anthropological, relational and ritual point of view, and in my opinion, is an enriching factor in this historic period.

The use of this kind of language and aesthetics certainly poses problems from the point of view of restoration, for which I cannot even imagine a solution. How can one think that a work can disappear once it has lived, and related to and changed throughout this process, only to reappear at that point in its transformation and then put it back in the hands of those who must change it once again? At this stage one must have a heightened sensitivity and here, in my opinion, the restorer must be a "poet" who has not only the ability to produce a synthesis of all the dimensions in the language of techniques, but also a certain sensitivity for the time in which he is living. An interdisciplinary approach comes first, but a change in our perspective on the problem is also required in both the Statute of restoration and in the training of those involved.

Marina Pugliese, Museo del Novecento, Milan: We must say that it is one thing when the restorer can work with the artist, while it is quite different when the artist is no longer alive and the restorer must make decisions for the artist – at which point he becomes more of a "prophet" than a "poet." At this point I turn to Mariano Boggia, President of the Fondazione Merz. Given that Mario Merz passed away quite a few

years ago, Mariano Boggia is one of those individuals who, as the head of the artist's Foundation, has inherited the legacy of Merz's artistic expression and must therefore resolve issues and take decisions in even the most complex or controversial situations, and especially when it comes to deciding whether to intervene and how.

This is a hot topic in the field of conservation and has much to do with the question of national differences as the approach to this issue varies from country to country: who decides? The owner of the work often thinks he can do what he believes to be correct, the Foundation and the heirs are involved, but in spite of whether international law and morality holds or not, every country has a degree of autonomy in the application of its statutes. We would like to hear more about Mariano Boggia's experience with Merz during his career and with the Foundation after the artist's death.

Mariano Boggia, Fondazione Merz, Turin: My role within the Foundation was born of longstanding personal experience with Mario Merz and other artists. I had the good fortune of meeting Mario in 1984 and from that point onwards I began to collaborate on the realisation of his works, but I never really dealt with organisational, secretarial or warehouse responsibilities.

I worked with the artist to produce new pieces. I also unwittingly acquired – and this I only noticed when Mario died – the capacity to calmly tackle the problem of re-presenting a work and deal with the subsequent conservation related problems. This experience has become shared knowledge within the Fondazione Mario Merz, which has the mission of preserving and protecting the figure of Mario Merz and his works.

Indeed, it is becoming a point of reference for all collections, both public and private, who may encounter problems in conservation, however I must note that most contact is with public collections as, from time to time, they implement programmes that foresee the "dusting off of their collections", while private collections are represented by a limited few who frequently approach us before the sale or purchase of a work at auction. However, if the auction houses would check these works in advance – a check that we require previous to the publishing of any works by Merz in their catalogues – there would be no need to contact the collectors, who in turn are rarely concerned with the proper preservation of works in their collections.

Obviously we are talking about complex works such as installations and objects, in other words everything and anything that is not a painting, because Mario produced a great number of paintings, whose conservation problems are usually solved independently by approved restorers. Strangely – and this often happens in collections –, it is believed that the Foundation is the place where the memory of the artist is stored along with an explanation of why the work was created in its specific form. This is often the beginning of a dialogue with the deaf in the sense that the restorer who makes contact with the Foundation generally asks questions about the history and the birth of the piece which no archive could ever answer – for example: why is one tube made of a material rather than another, or, why is the soil used one colour or another, or why is an element presented in one way or another…

All of these questions, included in the conservation dossier, are thus considered to be essential even if the restorer goes ahead and does what he thinks is best. What is missing, and what we are in fact trying to instate, is the notion that any form of collaboration between archives or foundations and conservators, or those who must guide the intervention methodology, should be closely linked to a discussion on the restoration methodology. Why is this happening: the restorer asks for information in order to acquire data and then reinterpret it in such a way as to make sure it is

consistent with his theories, while what we're looking for right now is to be able to debate the methods of restoration so that the final restoration will not become neither a copy of performance, nor a pallid memory of the original, effected purely in order to preserve the individual elements.

For some time now, I have had the role of intervening in difficult cases like these, however I have always felt ill-prepared to face the issues inherent in restoration, as my training consisted of a passionate involvement in the artist's activity, while my skills contain a certain degree of personal liberty. In this sense it is hard for me to believe that a theoretical, scholarly approach, is able to recover the wealth of contacts and knowledge that I learned directly from the artist, it seems to me that this is an impossible battle to win. However, if at the top of all priorities in the technical education of restorers there is a strong motivation for listening and an observation of the work of art – and here I do not speak of an object, but of a work of art that manifests itself first as a thought and then takes on its shape, which is especially true in the works of Mario Merz – there could be hope.

In fact, Mario did not build the igloos, but rather, he built the relational elements that occupy a space with a shape that inevitably unsettles the thoughts of the viewer. And so, now when we see an igloo we recognise it as a work by Merz and move on to the next room. We must preserve the disruptive nature of his work, just as he was able to take apparently ephemeral objects that have never kept in their original quality (here I think of Mario's work with newspapers, that have survived with the original newspapers intact), thus opening the problem to a lack of conservation .

I say this because Merz was not interested in the newspapers themselves (and therefore in the preservation of the materials), but rather in the repetition of his concept and his idea of intervention within the art world.

This is a moment of transition: Mario passed away a few years ago, the Foundation exists and the archive tries to act as the public voice to be consulted every time a conservation problem arises. Sometimes we come across bizarre conservation interventions carried out with good intentions, but which often manage to erase the thought that Mario had breathed into the work. Fortunately we also have an open minded approach to remedying mistakes. This will become easier as the archives becomes more authoritative in its approach to this matter, and in fact we have an elected scientific committee that helps the Foundation and addresses the most critical problems, however it takes time, practice and experience. This said, yes it takes time, but sometimes the rush to complete the restoration treatment, or the deadline of an auction mean that often immediate solutions are adopted without discussion.

Marina Pugliese, Museo del Novecento, Milan: This last theme, namely the specificity of the private market and the time constraints posed by the annual cadence of auctions, is in fact one of the weaknesses of conservation in general. It is however also an issue of great importance, because on one hand we have the best practice policies of the major museums and research centres, and on the other we face a reality dictated by the market, galleries, auction houses and exhibitions, that often force one to set things up quickly and work more on an aesthetic level than on anything else. Ours is a field of research that involves many issues. Antonio Rava has raised the question of how the so-called *imprimatur* can be handed down when the artist delegates the construction or restoration of a work to others, and wonders how one can teach this practice of becoming close to work. Rava has had the good fortune to carry out the work for Merz and with Merz and can thus be considered as an heir of this imprimatur, so I ask him if, in your view, the Foundation is asking the

question of how we can pass on this aspect to future generations.

Antonio Rava, Società Rava & C. Srl, Turin: We are definitely thinking about this because obviously we are not immortal. The Foundation has established a program of activities that alternates exhibitions dedicated to the oeuvre of Mario Merz with exhibitions of other contemporary artists' work. These artists are invited to produce their own project within the Foundation, but Mario's works always remain in the space, which means that they must be moved and mobilized within the Foundation according to choices made by visiting artists. Obviously, the Foundation always wants to show Mario's works to the best of its ability, and avoid those situations in which – as happens in certain museums and especially at group exhibitions – Merz's works are sacrificed because the dimensional factor that Mario always kept so clear in relation to the space in which the work is located, is not respected. Often the show is given a theme that encompasses one of Merz's works, but when one gets to the museum to mount it, frequently the space affects the visibility of the artist's work.

At the Foundation we try to overcome this by doing our best to present Mario's work not only in terms of its choice, but also in the way in which it is mounted. I no longer follow this process alone as I am now ably supported by the Attitudine Forma team. Within this team there are other people who are also lucky enough to have had the chance of working with Mario – perhaps not as long and closely as I did –, or at very least, as professionals working in the art world in Turin, while it must also be said Mario had an incredible ability to engage any person he found around him in his work. I have seen museum directors, curators and photographers lay out the papers and cameras and mount igloos because Mario needed people to intervene and thus invited them to do so. I have done this many more times, but I still do not know how many hundreds of people have laid hands on his igloos! Of course, I was behind him when he contemplated it and next to him on his walks, so I had a more direct contact, however, many people in Turin were privileged enough to have shared this contact, and I am definitely not the only heir. Certainly, I have more knowledge and greater sensitivity in identifying what needs to be done, but there are many people who have eyes to see and understand how to re-present one of Mario's works Mario properly.

Marina Pugliese, Museo del Novecento, Milan: The Museo del Novecento is currently hosting an exhibiton titled *Mixed Media,* which investigates the role of artistic techniques in the art of the twentieth century through a series of works selected from the permanent collection, new acquisitions, newly restored pieces and donations. This exhibition will be accompanied by a program of conferences organized in collaboration with INCCA, the first of which will take place on 24 May 2012 at 18.30, and will be lead by Silvia Berselli, who will focus on the role of photography in Twentieth century art. On 31 May 2012 we will discuss new media with Cosetta Saba at a meeting coordinated by Iolanda Ratti from the Tate; On 7 June 2012, we will look at Plastics with Antonio Rava (coordinated by Anna Laganà of ICN in Amsterdam) and finally on 14 June 2012 we will focus on the movement in twentieth century art with Barbara Cisternino of the National Gallery of Modern Art in Rome (coordinatied by Fabiana Cangià of the MAXXI Museum in Rome).

Picking up from where we left off, I would like to pass the discussion on to Roberto Dipasquale of Attitudine Forma, a team that is specialised in the installation of historic artworks – indeed Mariano Boggia referred to this company's familiarity and close contact with Mario's works and Arte Povera in general – but that also plays a key role in the work of young artists and the realisation of artworks. As we all know (and this was one of the main themes studied in the Mixed Media exhibition), in Twentieth century art and in most contemporary art, artists no longer need to master

technical skills as they often rely on others to realise their works. I would like to ask Roberto what differences he has identified in the approach of private clients – artists and collectors – and that of museum institutions? Also, what kind of role does Attitudine Forma play because often they not only produce works, but are also asked to restore them, and they therefore take on the position of an intermediary between the installation and conservation of artworks.

Roberto Dipasquale, Società Attitudine Forma, Turin: We are a total hybrid, so to speak, as often we receive requests for which highly technical skills are required, skills that only restorers have, and thus we rely on external professionals. However, the real difficulty is to be able to respond to such a varied and differentiated range of requests.

We owe our fortune to the existence of a network, or rather the sharing of different people's skills. The training that we were exposed to is very similar to that of Mariano: we were also artists' assistants, mostly based in Turin where the artists all knew each other. In fact, the Turin of twenty years ago was a cradle of excellence that involved an incredibly varied range of techniques given that – for historical reasons known to all – the artists who lived there came from all over the world and had access to an infinite number of craftsmen who were able to do extraordinary things. We came together thanks to these different skills, as each of us had a different ability. When we found ourselves working in institutions, the first thing we did was to voluntarily respect the specificity of others, and thus if you were to mount a work by a certain artist, one called a friend (despite all of the difficulties in communication at the time): be it through a Polaroid, a fax, a phone call carried that could not necessarily be carried out in front of the work, one did all of this in order to facilitate a direct comparison with the artist or with his assistant. Luckily, cell phones with cameras were invented, and now everything is far simpler. Through this subjective work, our profession grew.

We try to explain our work, but it is difficult to communicate this accumulation of experience to others, because even when we speak to our younger staff and collaborators, it is hard to find the words to describe what one is mounting or what needs to be removed. We have always maintained our respect for those who have something special, and so if we have to assemble works of this kind, we phone the person who works with another artist or restores art. The key is this: what our company requires is that there is a network and hence the possibility of creating a database, a body of information related to the artworks in hand, but also knowledge linked to how one can effectively re-present them.

It is always through unorthodox processes, and the restoration of some works – for example, the works of Gilberto Zorio in which chemical processes are uncontrolled and deliberately anarchic, and in which the material is "disorganised" (salts, paints, etc.) – that you achieve good results when you have the report of those who worked on it originally. This is our hope.

We are delighted to be here today because generally those who install art are not considered as the centre of a process, but sometimes they are in fact very close to this centre and we are happy to be at the beginning of this adventure with NeCCAR as it would be great to be able to contact New York in order to learn about or speak to the author of a work about the materials he used, or discuss possible solutions when the components are degraded or no longer function.

The restoration of contemporary art entails so many, diverse problems that it becomes incredibly difficult to pull together all of these elements in order to teach

them. Coming back to our city and our studies, which allowed us to deepen our knowledge and acquire a heightened sensitivity: firstly, and sadly, I would like to note that it is sometimes extremely difficult to find the things you need to work, because the same craftsman who, until fifteen years ago, made something, but is no longer there, means that the same component must be reinvented.

In terms of the theoretical aspect, since I am an technician, I do not know how to present myself as our experience is based on what the artist knows from the outset, that some things are unique and should not be repeated, and I hope that the discussion progresses taking into account, however, that there is a limit that cannot be overcome: re-presenting that which cannot be re-presented is a presumption that is somewhat exaggerated. This impression originates in encounters and confrontations with artists, because sometimes artists do not want to re-present their work, sometimes they destroy it, sometimes they purposely put the work in conditions that break it, so that it degenerates or destroys itself. In these cases, does the technician go against what is perceived as a desire to protect a higher meaning, or not? I think this doubt is a starting point.

This question specifically - the difference between public and private market - exists, and we who work in this field every day know this well: a work belonging to an institution has a much broader scope for intervention as the conservation aspects are delegated to conservators and we, given the haste and the conditions in which we have to operate when installing the works, have to give up. The private market is different because when the artist asks us to work with him, to assemble an artwork or restore it together, this activity creates a personal relationship, and through these opportunities we have witnessed interventions that have led to the alteration of the works' original aspects. Even when working with similar works, one comes to realise completely different results when working in a private or an institutional environment respectively.

If one could work as biologists do when they work on biodiversity, gathering all the information to make a collection, it would be incredibly useful as it would allow us to go beyond the problems that arise following the death of the artist and limit damage caused by "heavy handed" or "forced" restoration treatments. Yes, training is problematic, but one must not hide this fact as it is an extremely complex sector: there are skills that are purely aesthetic, and not technical, and this makes it clear that in this case one must select a single generation, in fact, we see that our younger generations who carry on, or move on, in order to test the passion that they put into their work. There must be a sensitivity that the stops one's hand when you reach the limit. At an academic level, it is difficult to understand what can be done: our desire is to remain in the network because we believe it is the key to success.

Marina Pugliese, Museo del Novecento, Milan: As I listened to this story about a network of friends and acquaintances who started to work together with artists from the Arte Povera movement on the installation of their works, and still work together to find solutions when problems arise, I like the idea that this symbiotic reality reflects the core motivation of the NeCCAR project, whose central aim is not only that of creating a network of professionals that can deal with emergencies, but also to constructively co-ordinate the training of new conservation professionals. Roberto Dipasquale spoke of a database through which to collect and compile information, and here I must point out that such a database already exists, and is run under the auspices of INCCA (International Network for the Conservation of Contemporary Art), but unfortunately this database functions on a voluntary basis, allowing individuals and professionals to publish artists interviews and reports on restoration online.

However, there are some countries – with Italy as a prime example – which are afflicted by language barriers, and given that INCCA is an international network and the data has to be published in English, this means that the many potential contributions never reach the database. Also, the fact that it is run on a voluntary basis does not help, because people involved have the pleasure of viewing the data but do not necessarily have the "free" time to constantly add or update the information available on this platform. In fact, one of the topics that we made yesterday in our NeCCAR meeting was to assume that we could start to carry out a census of artists' interviews on a national basis, always bearing in mind, however, that all data is then re-interpreted in a different context.

The artist's interview is a controversial tool because it is known that information given by artists is always highly subjective and therefore, those who access this resource must be able to read it critically and filter the information provided, or it could be dangerous.

The same applies to restoration reports, as we all know that conservation treatments are not always conducted properly. It is a sacred right to be able to share information with the largest possible audience, however this does not relieve those who benefit from their responsibility to read the data critically and use information in a responsible manner.

Mattia Patti, University of Pisa: I just want to emphasise and acknowledge a fact that emerges from these last points, a fact which I – as an art historian – consider to be of utmost importance in relation to our discussion as a whole: the importance of knowing how the artist works in his studio and his relationship with co-workers, whether they be installers or craftsmen, is nothing new in contemporary art. However, here, I think there is, as the last two contributions demonstrated, a strong continuity with the organisation of artists from centuries past. Just as the artist once relied on a goldsmith for the construction of a part of his work, now artists entrust specialised craftsman with the production of their work and here I think there is a dialogue, a strong shift in focus that includes both production and conservation, that – over and above the artist's interviews – reveals the essential importance of exploring the workspace and the function of the studio space as either a space exclusively dedicated to conceptual elaborations or a space in which works are both planned and produced.

Marina Pugliese, Museo del Novecento, Milan: On this note, I would like to thank Barbara Ferriani, Università di Venezia, Triennale Design Museum, Milan as she was one of the first Italian conservators to realise just how important it is to involve different skills and professions in the practice of conservation, even those professions whose roles feature long before the phase of restoration is reached – including those who collaborate with artists and install works.

Barbara has a very strong relationship with the private market – and while I, as an art historian who works in a museum, see things differently – her practical and realistic point of view, combined with a solid theoretical grounding, is a true resource.

However, I feel that it is very important that professionals working in universities and museums do not forget that often, an enormous part of the works' history is hidden, a story that is composed of everything that happens before the work enters a museum which creates a dense knit of layered elements. Yesterday Renée van der Vall spoke of a work's *biography*, and how – as Paolo Martore (Università degli Studi della Tuscia, Viterbo) pointed out –, institutions often have an ideological approach to the work in terms of how it is installed and restored, when in fact the institution must

also reflect on what came first. Even the most traumatic stories in a work's past must be considered, because in the private market there is still no real way of monitoring the conservation of artworks as museums do.

Another issue we confronted yesterday was that museums – for economic organisation al reasons –, have very different approaches, both from nation to nation and from institution to institution. If one thinks of Italy, few museums – like the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna di Roma (the National Gallery of Modern Art in Rome) – have in-house conservation laboratories on the premises, and must therefore out-source external professionals, thus making conservation an extremely complex and diversified aspect of a work's "life". At this point, we have exhausted our questions and would like to open the debate to the members of NeCCAR and of course to the public.

Barbara Ferriani, Università di Venezia, Triennale Design Museum, Milan: I wanted to pick up on some of the points that have come up during the discussion: the first is the notion of an unrepeatable artwork, as it has been applied to the context of Arte Povera as a historic episode. During this discussion, I thought about how we now have to deal with different problems because, if we think of the study of contemporary artists, we are faced with a new reality that involves hundreds of people. As for the production of the 1960s and 1970s, the ephemeral nature of the works was implicit, while the fact that most artists did think about the future, and the possible need for conservation, meant that this art form was less tied to the economic aspect. Today, a great part of contemporary art production is closely linked to economic gain and has therefore become the product of real "factories". Indeed, the presence of Attitudine Forma among us today is therefore incredibly significant, as when I collaborated with them as a restorer, the world of Mario Merz opened up before me for the first time.

Together we documented an installation for MART and I realised that without them it would not have been possible because I, as a restorer, had no real working knowledge of certain aspects of this artist's work. I noticed the same thing while working on the recent Arte Povera exhibition at the Triennale, when it was pointed out how the Pistoletto's rags seemed to be crumpled and crushed against the brick floor. There is a value that the restorer alone cannot understand. Let us not forget that we all have to deal with the problems posed by obsolescence and strict regulations, and often we cannot adapt integral parts of works to resolve both problems simultaneously. I would like to ask everyone, from your different fields of expertise, what problems you have faced without finding the necessary tools to resolve them...

Antonio Rava, Società Rava & C. Srl, Turin: I have only one note to add with regards to training: from what has been said thus far, it seems to me that it is crucial to erase an overly critical approach to the work of the artist so that the phrases "the artist was wrong" or "the artist chose the wrong materials" or "advise the artist to use more durable materials" be abandoned. This attitude prevents the correct perception and is counterproductive on an educational level. During the restoration course held at the Venaria, I urge students to abandon this form of criticism applied to contemporary art, because this attitude is what makes the person on the street look at contemporary art and say, "I could do that too." This same attitude of incomprehension is also found in relation to the concept of perishable media and the notion of timelessness, or lack of longevity: there is a world in these notions and it is this world that should be taught, or rather the capacity to go beyond the moment of displacement and attempt to understand the meaning, the scope, and the importance of this kind of teaching. I do not see another point from which to outline

this difference.

Marina Pugliese, Museo del Novecento, Milan: I would like to ask my international fellows for their feedback.

Filippo Di Giovanni, Attitudine Forma,Turin: In our work as installers, we have always had a very good relationship with the restorers, but this relationship can sometimes enter into conflict. However, we are more than aware that examples of perishable materials and changes in materials used by artists are something that we accept when we work with the artists.

One has to provide concrete examples. If one mounts a work by Kounellis made of iron girders and embedded pieces of coke, if a piece of coal (coke) comes away or is lost, the restorer goes to check all the numbers and the piece of coal that fell. In fact, the carbon must be replaced but if you go and find, number and count how many pieces of coal form the lump so you can remake it, it is pointless because what you need is sensitivity.

To mount the *Venere degli stracci* you do not only take the Venus and fill it with rags, you do not make a "cake". It has happened more than once that we have seen a "cake" of rags that crushes the Venus, when really you need to make the heap of rags appear as if they are fluctuating, floating. This complexity is also present in the search for materials that are no longer used: how does one argue that you cannot change a pink neon tube in a work by Flavin because his tubes from the 1970s are no longer manufactured by General Electric, when the company does still produce these tubes even if the pink is slightly different – to the point that it is difficult to define.

We are faced with difficulties that, as Roberto Dipasquale said, you can only deal with if you have a system through and with which to communicate as to what can be done and what can still be traced.

Renée van de Vall, Maastricht University: I ask Paolo Rosa how one copes with the change of a work's habitat, as happen in the new generations accustomed to a frenetic relationship with reality and a faster and more interactive experience of their existence. In a dimension of this kind, how does one place the work of Studio Azzurro and how, if possible, can you ensure its conservation.

Paolo Rosa, Studio Azzurro Produzioni S.r.l., Milan: This question is complex. Can we really turn to the past in order to confront the future? I wonder how a restorer or conservator or anyone charged with the preservation of a memory linked to a certain, almost primitive experience of art, in which the products of a certain aesthetic level become the subject of a ritual, which means that these objects are transformed in form and meaning through the patina, from the surface to their core, from a nail to mirror. They start out as common objects, only to undergo a transformation that originates in a ritual that has sprung up around them and which leads us to reflect on how they should be preserved. We need to decide whether it be necessary to remove the nails and mirrors or not, so as to bring the object back to its original shape or form, or should we continue to think that this form is actually enhanced by the sedimentation of ritual meaning over time.

I imagine something like this: I think the participatory dimension that has emerged through the web is part of a powerful, generative process for art, of which it is necessary to keep a trace that is no longer a heroic version of the original, but rather a record of the development of this process, which, being a process, has no end. I think this could be the key, which should naturally gain leverage from another

conservation process, that of memory. In this extreme technological era we have to build on archaic communicative dimensions such as the oral transmission of memory.

The work mentioned earlier, *Il Nuotatore* (The Swimmer), created in 1980, encompasses this aspect and has helped me to understand this dimension: on the one hand, there is the problem of technical conservation in as much as this was the first installation to become a subject for a conservation study and investigations into re-digitalising related to this field – this means that the process of digitalising the work was carried out with instruments that reconstructed the experiential taste of the work on the basis of the changes it underwent during the transfer of data (a CD does not have the same quality as a vinyl record) – during the work of a German study in Cologne, that aimed to reconstruct the grain originally presented by the tools that we have taken up again. This was an extremely technical job which raised the question of how one preserves this technical data: here we need to work out how the network can continuously update the data in order to avoid the increasingly rapid rate of obsolescence that affects the latest media.

The new technologies used today quickly perish, and the generation of thirty years ago now seems a world away. In fact, the magnetic strips of thirty years ago can no longer be read, while and digitalisation done ten years also requires updating as the systems used then are now obsolete in that they consist of digital data on magnetic tape that is then transcribed onto another format.

In addition to this aspect there is another technical process that should be considered and preserved: the imaginary reality that is produced by works that contain a strong element of chance be it in performances or installations. Within this dimension something is generated, something that remains in the viewer's experience, and it is from this experiential data that much contemporary art gains leverage (I would prefer not to call it contemporary art, but rather the art of our time), to produce a form of word of mouth. This means that memory also affects the narration of the work by one person to another, and represents the "other" soul of the work.

This memory, for example in the case of *Il Nuotatore* (The Swimmer), was fertile: I have come across a lot of people who have recognised me as the creator of the work, but have never actually seen the work or heard a narration of its content.
In my opinion, this should also be considered to be a very interesting aspect of the work because someone told someone else about it and, even though he/she probably added something of his/her own to the narration, this means that the experience had a deep impact on the viewer, and therefore the growth that he can give can only be positive, it is the growth of something that lives. We all know that memory must live in order to be vital, otherwise it becomes a frozen obsession. We also need to take care of this aspect, and perhaps at this point in the game new forms of knowledge that we have not yet identified, must come into play.

Mariano Boggia, Fondazione Merz, Turin: The relationship I had with Mario was certainly, and first and foremost, a bond characterized by affection and friendship, the instrument through which knowledge and wisdom are passed. Without it I would not have stayed at his side for as long as I did. I met Mario in the context of the Art Povera exhibition in Turin in 1984, at which time I was inside the exhibition space when Mario arrived with two assistants and installed his work. After six months, the exhibition went to Madrid and Mario came back with another assistant. The third stop was New York, where I started to mount the igloos for him, at which point I decided that it was worth taking the risk of commitment to work side by side with this artist for the pleasure it gave me to spend time with him. I wanted to do

something professional, something which had as its starting point in a relationship that was also sentimental in part. This was the reason why I was able to absorb that which the previous assistants (who lasted three months at a time) were unable to do.

However, the idea that this knowledge die with me is not something I want to happen.

Mario used to express the following concept: "that which I have to express is expressed through my works, and so those who want to get to know me, must do so through my works". This is the beacon that has always guided me and thus, through the continuity in the manifestation of his works, I think the best that you can do is create the right conditions so that other people, who may be just as attentive and sensitive, can learn what is needed in order to pass on the necessary approach and techniques required in to the re-presentation of these works. Finally, I would like to add one last thing – although I hope it doesn't appear as a forced addition to today's discussion –: having finally found a venue that is willing to host a meeting for professionals with different skills (and I thank NeCCAR for opening the door to a debate on restoration to other professionals), I think that this act of widening the approach should be extended to the figure of conservators themselves.

When one speaks of obsolescence, one is speaking of the need to focus on those works that have already undergone maintenance or treatments in order to understand what is still presentable, and what is not, – and here Attitudine Forma also has direct experience – otherwise you find yourself in a position that, often in the context of an exhibition, we go beyond the terms of the work's "presentability". One simply includes the work in the catalogue, because one has too, and problems soon arise, but have to be addressed in haste. The curator must foresee this situation before the trucks arrive and the crates are unloaded, so that they can see if the work is really feasible. Furthermore, the curator must focus not only with the material conditions of the work in conservation terms, but also on the space in which it will be positioned. One must be aware that the conservation of a work is effected through the preservation of its components as well as the preservation of the spatial conditions that allow for the perfect manifestation of a work's true values and the artist's thought.

Marina Pugliese, Museo del Novecento, Milan: This is one of the points we touched on yesterday. Essentially, many art historians from Universities or institutions do contribute to discussions on the topic of conservation; however there is a great absence of curators and museum directors at these discussions, with the result that those individuals who hold institutional positions with great decisional powers are not involved. As mentioned, we are dealing with power-based relations (the power of those who "own" the information and can therefore decide whether and how to install works, be they collectors or artists), which in turn create situations in which the installer and restorer come face-to-face with a number of issues that – and here I return to what Antonio Rava said – in a way affects their ability to interpret the work and their sensitivity to the aspects that make all the difference, in reference to the *Venere degli Stracci* for example, this difference lies between the act of placing the rags lightly on their support and that of making a heavy "Christmas cake".

Translation: Emma Hedley