Reset the Apparatus!

Retrograde Technicity in Artistic Photographic and Cinematic Practices

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Introduction

When, in 1882, Friedrich Nietzsche began using a typewriter instead of his usual ink pen, he quickly noticed that the new technical tool was having an impact on his writing style, which had become tighter and more telegraphic. In one of his few typewritten letters, the German philosopher stated: "Our writing tools are also working on our thoughts" ("Unser Schreibzeug arbeitet mit an unseren Gedanken," quoted in Kittler 1999: 200). The idea that the hardware used – in the case of writing, pen, typewriter or computer – has an influence upon the outcome, is central to Friedrich Kittler's media theory. By paying close attention to the materiality of technical processes and tools – Nietzsche's typewriting experience is just one among many examples he references – Kittler abandons any instrumentalist conception of technology in favor of a revaluation of its agential dimension. In agreement with Kittler's perspective that technology is never neutral, but rather is fundamental to media use, the artistic research project *Reset the Apparatus!*[1] investigates the collision of supposedly obsolete technical devices with contemporary cutting-edge artistic

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[1] The three year international project brings together artists and scholars to collaborate on artistic research. It is based at the Department of Media Theory of the University of Applied Arts Vienna (Austria); it was launched in March 2016, and is funded by the Austrian Science Fund. Its core team consists of Nina Jukić and Gabriele Jutz, along with Edgar Lissel as the project leader. Partners include the Austrian Film Museum, the Department of Photography at the University of Applied Arts Vienna, and the Photography Program at the Folkwang University of the Arts in Essen (Germany). Website: http://www.resettheapparatus.net

practices. What the artworks we examine have in common is not only an endeavor to put into crisis the familiar photographic/cinematic apparatus but also an engagement with a form of technicity, which can be termed "retrograde," because they – the artworks – rely on outdated media, formats and devices, especially photographic and filmic works that are based on photo-chemical materials. It is important to note that this "return" to seemingly obsolete technologies is neither a result of rejecting what is presently at hand nor a nostalgic orientation towards the past, but rather fulfills a *critical* function – as many scholars using various artistic and media practices as examples have demonstrated (Krauss 1999; Didi-Huberman 1999; Manovich 2001; the journal *October*'s special issue on "Obsolescence" 2002; Mulvey 2006; Rodowick 2007; Acland 2007; Huhtamo and Parikka 2011; Jutz 2011; Parikka 2012; Balsom 2013). The move to purportedly outdated technologies is evidenced by recent exhibitions such as "Cameraless Film" at Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt (2010), "Light, Paper, Process: Reinventing Photography" at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles (2015), and "Celluloid" at the EYE Film Museum in Amsterdam (2016). Interestingly, the phenomenon of retrograde technicity today is prominent not only in art, but also in popular culture (Thorne 2003; Jukić 2015) – from the revival of Polaroid photography to such recent inventions as the *LomoKino*. Hence, it is a broad social phenomenon that is having a considerable impact on the ways we interact with audio-visual media.

Reset the Apparatus! is – at the time of this paper's publication – an ongoing research project, and accordingly, instead of presenting any final results the first part of this paper will raise a number of methodological, ontological and terminological questions: How does the notion of the "apparatus" contribute to a better

understanding of artistic practices? How can the temporal aspect inherent in the

notion of "retrograde" be conceptualized without falling into the traps of linearity and

teleology? Is the analog/digital opposition helpful to distinguish between "old" and

"new" media or should it be reconsidered? How is technological change related to the

body and the senses? And – crucial for a project based on *artistic* research – what

drives practitioners to deal with media formats and technologies of the past? The

second part of the paper will then present one of the core outcomes of our research,

an annotated database of selected artworks as well as its underlying curatorial

principles. The conclusion will consider to what extent these artistic practices are able

to be mobilized for critical purposes.

Methodological, ontological and terminological issues

Let us begin with the term "apparatus" or French *dispositif*.[2] Developed in the context

of 1970s film studies (Baudry 1970 and 1975), "apparatus theory" tried to elucidate

the technical, ideological and psychological operations involved in the situation of a

film-screening. Broadly speaking, the apparatus encompasses three distinct

components: the technical base of the camera, projector and filmstrip; the spectator

along with his or her "mental machinery"; and the representation, the film itself

projected before the viewer onto a screen. In order to be productive for our research

project, this 1970s concept of the cinematic apparatus needs a double revision

because, first, it is limited to cinema and so has to be rethought in photographic

terms; and second, it does not entail the act of production (as opposed to the act of

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[2] English discussions of apparatus theory use the word "apparatus" for two distinct French terms, "appareil" and "dispositif" (Mayne 1993: 47).

reception), which is so crucial to artistic research. In this second regard, François Albera and Maria Tortajada's (2011) recent methodological propositions regarding the concept of the apparatus or *dispositif* have the advantage of taking into consideration the producer as well as the situation of production. Having in mind the scientific photographic experiments undertaken by Eadward Muybridge and Etienne-Jules Maray in the late 19th century, Albera and Tortajada conceptualize the experimenter (whether scientist or artist) as the first "user" or "observer" – and hence he himself (including the situation of experimentation) becomes part of the apparatus (Albera and Tortajada 2011: 16).

Whereas "apparatus" stresses the mechanical side, *dispositif* underlines the aspect of a specific *disposition* or arrangement. Inherent to the earlier notion of the *dispositif* is the idea of a certain "appropriate" distance between spectator, screen and projector. As Albera and Tortajada point out, not only the screening situation (or, in the case of scientific experiments, the situation of monstration), but the production situation too can be regarded from a spatial viewpoint. It is this readjustment of apparatus theory's spatial terms to include production that proves useful in the context of artworks that explore, deconstruct, reflect, modify, and rearrange the photographic and/or cinematic apparatus because it helps to describe the activity of the artist (or producing subject), and the relationship between the artist's body and his/her material in regard to their arrangement (Jutz 2011).

The term "retrograde technicity" has the advantage of situating itself within the broader field of obsolescence, and highlighting the datedness of *technological* forms. However, it has the disadvantage – besides perhaps its unfamiliarity – of implying an opposition between older, and more "primitive" or simpler forms of

technology and newer, more advanced or "sophisticated" ones, and hence to foster a linear way of understanding media history. Referring to the beginnings of cinema, Thomas Elsaesser, for example, reminds us that cinema's technological development has often been mapped as additive, involving a linear progress towards greater and greater realism: "early films were often in colour, cinema performances were rarely silent, […] there were giant screens around 1900, and there was 3-D (stereoscope) before there was 2-D" (Elsaesser 2016: 185). As there is sufficient reason to doubt hegemonic linearity that seemingly works towards constant progress and improvement, the relation between older and newer technologies has to be conceived in a more complex way. Thus it is necessary to develop alternative models of temporality and to understand "retrograde technicity" no longer as a return to a prior, bygone technological state. According to Elsaesser, "apparent 'returns' […] need not be plotted on a chronological timeline and therefore need not be seen as returns at all, but instead, appear as ever-present resources that film-makers and artists are able to deploy as options and possibilities" (Elsaesser 2016: 201).

With regard to alternative temporalities, Katherine Russell's (2002) concept of "parallax historiography" invokes a sense of parallelism between visual cultures at the beginning and at the end of the 20th century, and Siegfried Zielinski's (2006) research into the "deep time of media" are only two examples that contain useful clues as to how to challenge temporal linearity. Attempts to find multi-temporal ways of understanding technological change can also benefit from media archaeology, which "sees media cultures as sedimented and layered, a fold of time and materiality where the past might be suddenly discovered anew, and the new technologies grow obsolete increasingly fast" (Parikka 2012: 3).

This leads to our next point, the distinction between analog and digital media. It is true that the advent of digital technology marks an ontological change in the nature of the medium from the material ground of the photo-chemical to the immaterial algorithmic. But is the distinction analog/digital also the best way to understand retrograde photographic and cinematic practices? While on the surface the current turn to "older" media is seemingly caused by digitization, a wider historical perspective demonstrates that this turn existed already in pre-digital times. For example, one of the first avant-garde films, Bruno Corra and Arnaldo Ginna's lost experiment from 1911, was realized without the use of a camera (Jutz 2010). Another case is the Dadaists' tendency to engage with dated technology (Elsaesser 1996: 21). Hence, the "reaction" argument is not a suitable explanation for the peculiarities of retrograde practices. Moreover, one may consider the analog/digital-split in a different way and – instead of considering it as a purely ontological question – relate it to the producing subject or artist. In this regard, D.N. Rodowick's differentiation between "transcribing" and "transcoding" media proves useful. The analogical mode "transcribes before it represents" (Rodowick 2007: 78), whereas the digital mode implies a transcoding process from light or sound waves into digits or codes that precede *digital* representation. Giovanna Fossati rephrases the analog versus digital debate, to one among media, that is, between those media which are immediately *intelligible* to the observer and can be called "isomorphic," and those, which require transcoding in order to allow intelligibility.

> From this perspective also analog sound waves (or the analog video images) transcribed onto a magnetic tape would not be isomorphic, as the magnetic signal cannot be directly interpreted as sound or moving images by our senses.

Also in this case a sort of transcoding process has occurred, even though

within the "continuous" physical domain. […] Analog photography and film,

in the end, are a technological singularity since they are the only

representation systems that are fully transcoding-free and isomorphic with the

originating image, as photographic images are transcribed and stored in a way

that is intelligible for us without any kind of transcoding process (Fossati

2009: 18).

Fossati's conclusion that "the concepts of analog and digital do not help in

distinguishing between those media that are intelligible for us and those that need

transcoding to allow intelligibility" (Fossati 2009: 18), contributes to our

understanding why practitioners today decide to work with so-called obsolete media.

As discussions among our project partners have shown, the artists' choices of

particular media is not motivated by the oppositions analog/digital or old/new, but it

is precisely certain medias' transcoding-free quality that makes them attractive.

Media that transcribe have the advantage of making creative processes transparent

and comprehensible because the artist has direct access to the results. Even the

building or modification of the corresponding machines the artists use in their

artworks' production and reception – from recorders to projectors – is to be

comprehended within notions of skill and handcraft. In sum, the terms "analog" and

"digital" are problematic for the reasons set out above. Nevertheless, as they are

widely used and accepted, we will not abandon them completely, but rather keep in

mind that they carry certain layers of meaning that should be debated.

In accordance with Fossati, we have shifted the analog-versus-digital debate

and its related ontological questions to, rather, a debate between the intelligible and

the non-intelligible. This slight but momentous move is equivalent to a turn towards the artist's body. The question how technological change is related to the body and its modes of sensation is currently widely discussed under the term "embodied perception," or simply "embodiment." When it comes to embodied vision, there is, however, a strong tendency among contemporary scholars to highlight the observer or spectator's activity (Strauven 2011; Elsaesser 2016), whereas *Reset the Apparatus!* focuses on the artist as producer without neglecting the spectatorial dimension. Contemporary hands-on viewing culture with its touch screens, virtual reality helmets or the tactility of computer games is far from new. Corporeal involvement in the viewing process was already integral to 19th century vision machines and optical toys that required manual operation by the observer. As Wanda Strauven demonstrates, the "'look, don't touch' rule" (Strauven 2011: 157) is not an atemporal principle. When we shift the focus to the producer of still or moving images, it is true that the conventional camera is designed to keep the operator's body at a distance, to reduce him or her to a pure eye. In the case of artistic practices, however, producers of images are quite astute at exploring the limits of a given rule. As many of the artistic examples gathered in our database demonstrate, artists often reject the spatial arrangements of conventional camera-based media for the benefit of perceptual experiences leading to an involvement of the entire body. Thus, attempts aimed at a direct contact with the apparatus should not be limited to the viewing experience (observer/spectator) alone, but also be considered as crucial to the producer/artist's activity.

The "CORPUS" and its curatorial concept

One of the main outcomes of *Reset the Apparatus!* is an annotated database of

selected artworks (the "CORPUS") exemplifying the myriad ways how the

photographic or cinematic apparatus can be "reset." The database is constructed

around a curatorial concept of grouping works under different *tags*, whereby each tag

corresponds to at least one aspect that critically addresses – and resets – the

traditional notion of the apparatus. This section lays out the theoretical framework of

each tag and presents artistic examples, which are not merely illustrations but

concrete enactments of theoretical and aesthetic concepts.

Analogital

Today there is a growing interest among artists to bring the analog and the digital

together in unexpected ways. "Analogital" is a term coined by Verena Kuni to "mark

a broader scope of possible relationships between 'hybrid unions' of analog and

digital" (Kuni 2015: 2).

      One such analogital artifact is the *LomoKino*, a small, plastic, hand-cranked

camera developed in 2011 that uses standard 35 mm photographic film to shoot very

short silent films at only three to five frames per second. One roll of film produces a

maximum of one minute of movie material. To create a movie out of the exposed roll

of film the negative has to be scanned and processed in movie-making software on a

computer. Sound can be added digitally. Although mostly aimed at amateur analog

photography and film enthusiasts, *LomoKino* has proven to be an interesting tool for

artistic experimentation. Thai director Apichatpong Weerasethakul shot his short

Ashes (2012) on *LomoKino*, exploring a wide range of possibilities that this new-old

medium offers – from in-camera multiple exposures to various projection speeds in digital post-production. Weerasethakul used approximately 100 rolls of standard 35 mm photographic film to shoot *Ashes*. The film takes the analogital approach to another level by ending with a scene shot on digital camera with synchronized sound.

Body Involvement

Technical media such as photography and film usually keep the body at a distance, and therefore fulfill the Modernist paradigm of *ocularcentrism* – that is, an objective eye seemingly detached from the rest of the body. The tag "Body Involvement," however, investigates corporeal interactions with the artwork from two points of view: (1) the artists themselves establish a tactile relationship with their material (be it hardware or software, such as photo paper or filmstrip); (2) the viewers turn into active participants of the artwork's coming into being by themselves operating or touching the apparatus, instead of merely watching from a distance.

Thomas Bachler's (D) *The Third Eye* (1985), which turned the artist's oral cavity into a camera, offers an excellent example of how the body can be involved in the making of a photograph. Bachler took self-portraits by facing a mirror and holding a film strip in his mouth, with the slight opening of his lips working as an aperture. In effect, his body photographed itself. Another example is Gustav Deutsch's (A) expanded cinema performance *Taschenkino* (*Pocket Cinema*, 1995). Deutsch distributed one hundred Super-8 micro-viewers among an audience of one hundred people sitting in a dark movie theater, each holding up to his eye a small plastic viewer containing a 30-second continuous loop. The silence is only interrupted by the clicks of fingers on the viewer buttons and the sound of a gong when it is time

to pass the viewer on to the next person. *Taschenkino* harks back to early motion picture devices, such as the zoetrope and the mutoscope, in which the viewers themselves physically interacted with the viewing device so that the users' bodies became part of the machine's functioning. Wanda Strauven calls this the "player mode" of moving images, as opposed to the later "viewer mode" (Strauven 2011: 152). For *one month on skin* (2013–2014), Olena Newkryta (A) asked friends to carry a developed but unexposed piece of negative film close to their skin for one month. Afterwards, she enlarged the negatives onto photographic paper. By allowing direct contact between his or her body and the light sensitive surface, each participant became the creator of a unique abstract image.

By Other Means

Translating film or photography into other – non-photographic and non-cinematic – media, forms or techniques, adds another variable to a rather simplified notion of digital media as being new and analog old. Artworks that fall under this research tag fulfill two requirements: first, they have to be executed with means other than photographic or cinematic artistic media; and second, those media must have existed before photographic or cinematic artistic practices were established, for instance, drawing, writing, or performing. "By Other Means" de-emphasizes the importance of the material properties of the medium itself in favor of its conceptual dimension, its generative idea. This conceptual perspective allows for a fuller understanding of the critical potential inherent to technology. According to Pavle Levi, the only way to maintain the utopian potential originally contained in any new medium before it becomes standardized is to repeatedly evoke and enact the discrepancy between the

medium as a concept – an ensemble of unrealized possibilities – and as an actual apparatus – the familiar standardized device we know (Levi 2010: 67).

Film zeichnen (2015) by Hanna Schimek (A) is one such example. Having been involved in various projects based on viewing and analyzing large bodies of archival film material, Schimek used drawing as an instrument for research and internal communication, as an aid to visual memory and as a means for abstraction and observation. According to the artist, drawing consists of contrasts between light and dark, just as photography-based media does, but unlike them, it also allows pictorial content to be added, emphasized or omitted. Fiona Banner's (UK) *Apocalypse Now* (1996) is a cross-medium translation of Francis Ford Coppola's eponymous 1979 Vietnam epic consisting of a hand-scribbled single block of text describing the entire film from the viewer's perspective and measuring seventeen square meters. Banner's written account needs to be read as an engagement with scale, handwriting and narrative.

Lost & Found

The artistic works gathered in this field enter into a dialogue with the history of photography and film, either as a media-archaeological investigation into media apparatuses or by drawing their material from already existing image stocks. "Lost & Found" addresses these two different aspects. As far as the invention of hardware is concerned, artists explore overlooked or forgotten aspects of our media-technological past. This might result in belated inventions, fake pieces of media archaeology, or re- and deconstructions of seemingly familiar media apparatuses. Appropriation, on the other hand, is an aesthetic strategy of reusing pre-existing

images. The extensive use, transformation, and re-interpretation of photographic or filmic images made by others as well as carefully selected material from archives are characteristic of this approach. Both invention and appropriation involve memory, recollection, loss, retrieval and rediscovery.

Film ist. (1998, 2002, 2009) by Gustav Deutsch (A) is a film project consisting of three parts and thirteen chapters, titled "Movement and Time," "Material" or "Magic." It defines "cinema through its own material, with and in the very flesh of images. The filmmaker's purpose is to discuss film using film, to rely on the expressive possibilities of the medium itself in order to illuminate its mechanisms from within" (Belloï 2012: 233). *Film ist.* resulted from extensive research at mostly Austrian and German archives, as well as at the American Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender and Reproduction. The installation *Rio-Montevideo* (2011–2016) by Rosângela Rennó (BR) confronts visitors with 32 slides by Aurelio González, the chief photographer of the daily newspaper *El Popular*, which were taken before the Chilean military coup in 1973 and had long been considered lost. Though, like Deutsch, Rennó also uses archival footage, the setting here is quite different: viewers can switch the projectors on and off and thus decide for themselves how long they want to look at each picture. These manual interventions required from the audience can be interpreted as a critical commentary on the permanent availability of digital images. For the projection, Rennó used twenty slide projectors of varying formats, models and eras found in flea markets in Rio de Janeiro and Montevideo.

Material Agency

Matter itself can have an agential dimension and play an active and at times even dominant role in artistic practices. The resurgence of materialist practices has fostered a variety of unorthodox production methods. For example, external influences, such as water, heat and weather, or biological processes, or even the human body with its fluids and substances, such as blood, urine, sperm and spit, can all serve as resources to which the sensitive surfaces of photo paper or a film strip can be exposed (Knowles 2013). From this perspective, matter is no longer regarded as "'dumb', 'mute', 'irrational' stuff on which humans act" (Bolt 2013: 5), but as a kind of co-producer. Dealing with active (rather than passive) matter raises the question of materiality and its performative power.

David Gatten's (US) *What the Water Said* (1997–1998) is an example of a mode of production of images (and sound) that is only possible with analog media that "transcribes." At various times and for various durations, the artist submerged unspooled rolls of film stock inside a crab trap underwater, so that the resultant images and sounds became the result of a series of camera-less collaborations between the filmmaker, the Atlantic Ocean, and a crab trap. Depending on changing weather conditions and the film stock used, the traces left behind by sand, rocks, shells and aquatic fauna, emerge as abrasions and scratches at varying depths and densities. Not unlike Gatten's *What the Water Said,* Meghan Riepenhoff's (US) experiments with cameraless photographic processes trust in nature as collaborator. Her works from the series *Littoral Drift* (2013–present) are large-scale cyanotypes with a sculptural quality, due to the artist's specific working process. After coating sheets of paper with homemade cyanotype emulsion, she exposes them to ocean

waves, rain or snow. The cyanotype is only partially fixed, which results in a print's colors fluctuating over time or even salt crystals blooming on the surface of the paper.

Relics

Photography and film are both deemed to be classical media of recording and reproduction. Artworks addressed under the tag "Relics," however, often bypass these processes by making the object itself manifest, instead of its reproduction, or even by presenting it simultaneously alongside its reproduction. Whereas the photographic image is usually described as a copy or trace of a depicted object, relics can be considered as fragments of reality, able to bring something from the real world into the picture plane.

A well-known example is Stan Brakhage's (US) short film *Mothlight* (1963), created without the use of a camera. "Brakhage collected dead moths, flowers, leaves, and seeds. By placing them between two layers of Mylar editing tape, a transparent, thin strip of 16mm celluloid with sprocket holes and glue on one side, he made *Mothlight*, 'as a moth might see from birth to death if black were white'" (Sitney 1979: 157–158). For *Domus Aurea* (2005)*,* developed in cooperation with archaeologists and biologists, Edgar Lissel (D) used the propensity of photosensitive bacteria to move towards light sources to create an image. A bacterial culture called *Leptolyngba* was discovered in the excavated site of the *Domus Aurea* in Rome, and was deemed responsible for the destruction of its frescoes. Lissel transferred the bacteria onto a plasterboard that was moistened with a nutrient solution, and exposed it to the negative image of a ruined fresco for over a period of several months. The light-

sensitive bacteria oriented themselves to the bright image areas and after several months began to redraw the outlines of the original image – something that had not been seen for centuries. After the plasterboard had dried up, the bacteria stayed as relics on its surface

Repurposing the Hardware

Repurposing the hardware is achieved by modifying the mechanical or optical parts of the technical equipment involved in the making of photography or film – in particular, the camera and the projector – or by replacing them with other tools. Simply put, a camera is a light-proof box with a lens through which light enters and projects an image onto a light-sensitive photochemical material, whereas a projector is an optical instrument for projecting still or moving images upon a surface. The term "hardware" refers to the mechanical and optical parts of the equipment, each of which offers the possibility of being altered. Hence, the concept of "Repurposing the Hardware" focuses on artistic practices that employ a modification of the standard camera or projector or even their replacement with other tools or materials. This frequently occurs in works that explore cinema's spatiality, be it in live performance or installation. The sheer range of inventiveness with which artists repurpose hardware, bestowing upon it new and original uses, is remarkable. Inherent to these inventions is the artist's search for unforeseen results, which are not usually attainable with standard apparatuses. Besides rejecting standardized technical processes, repurposed hardware is also an expression of the artists' refusal to capitulate to the increasing commodification of their tools. It could also be seen as an

act of resistance towards the inaccessibility of our digital gadgets' interiors, increasingly hidden from us beneath flat, shiny surfaces.

Steven Pippin (UK) found out that a washing machine possesses all the relevant parts to function as a camera, and that he only had to modify its glass front as a lens and shutter device and to add the proper chemicals. There was also the benefit of being able to process the negative picture afterward by pouring the chemicals directly into the machine's powder drawers and then run it through its cycles. Pippin decided to realize his series *Laundromat-Locomotion* (1997) in a public laundromat with twelve converted washers aligned in a row. To shoot a sequence of photographs he attached cotton trip-wires to each of the machines; these activated the camera whenever something passed it. As the title suggests, *Laundromat-Locomotion* is a homage to the pioneering photographer Eadweard Muybridge and his analysis of human and animal motion. To the artist's surprise, the resulting images looked like beautiful Muybridge originals (Pippin 1998). Another compelling example for modifying the hardware – the 16mm-projector in this case – is Sandra Gibson and Luis Recoder's (US) installation *Light Spill* (2005). Thanks to the artists' simple removal of the take-up reel, instead of projecting images on to a screen some distance forward, the projector spills thousands of feet of celluloid onto the floor; it gathers there in a pile, which becomes – depending on the duration of the installation – bigger and bigger. *Light Spill* is about "the failure of projection, the uselessness of film. The movement of a reel of celluloid through the projector is what is compelling, not any projected image. […] Like ancient linotype machines that sit in museums, or vacant factories that once produced and developed films, Gibson and Recoder's work is a reflection of what something was but is barely anymore" (Hanhardt 2016: 101–102).

Very Slow

The notion of slowness provides a critical framework for discovering aspects of deceleration in contemporary artworks, and which allow intense experiences in time and space. Photographers and filmmakers have evolved different aesthetic strategies to address the challenges of slowness as a critical stance. Film as a time-based medium possesses several possibilities for reflecting upon alternate temporalities. Although slow-motion was already available in cinema in the early 20th century, it has become an important aesthetic device over the last decades. Despite the fact that photography can only *represent* but not *reproduce* movement, photographers have experimented on visualizing the flow of time. For example, the calculated use of open shutter techniques resulting in prolonged exposure times, which range from minutes to several years, provides a way of withdrawing from the frantic realm of homogenized instantaneity. Far from romanticizing "slower pasts," in keeping with Lutz Koepnick, aesthetic slowness has to be seen as a decidedly modernist practice and as a strategy of the contemporary to intensify our present-day temporal and spatial experiences (Koepnick 2014).

Gebhard Sengmüller's (A) *Slide Movie* (2006) turns 24 slide projectors into inefficient movie projectors by cutting up a 35mm filmstrip into its single frames and fixing them as slide frames, resulting in a kind of (s)low-tech film projection. "The formula 'one projector per frame' thus gives rise to something that at least rudimentarily (and inevitably very inaccurately, due to the lack of precision of the mechanical devices) suggests a motion picture. The film soundtrack emerges as a byproduct – the mechanical clattering of the projectors changing slides" (Sengmüller 2008: 280). The installation *1991* (2010) by Karthik Pandian and Mathias Poledna

(US/A) consists of a series of 24 large-format slides showing a portrait of a model.
The slide series is derived from a 35mm film from which each of the 24 individual
frames from one second of footage were turned into individual slides. Projected over
a period of several weeks with only a single image presented each day, the entire
running time of the piece is exactly one second.

Conclusion

This article's aim has been to draw an interim review of the current state of the
artistic research project *Reset the Apparatus!* Instead of presenting final results, it has
given priority to raising terminological, ontological and methodological questions
with regard to key issues of the present project. Therefore, the purpose of the first
section was to look critically at such notions as "apparatus" and "retrograde
technicity," as well as temporality and "analog/digital," and to show their usefulness
but also their limitations. Focusing on terminological and ontological issues led to a
fine tuning of questions of methodology. In this respect, the paper has argued that,
when dealing with retrograde art practices, it is vital to shift the focus from the
observer/spectator to the "producing subject" and to describe how the artist interacts
with his/her medium or material in corporeal terms.

To show how art-based research puts knowledge into practice and feeds into a
database, the second part of this article introduced the "CORPUS," a continuously
evolving collection of artworks that serves as a useful tool and reference point for
scholars, artists, curators, and students. Each tag assigned to the artworks implies a
critical engagement with the conventional apparatus or *dispositif*. If, for instance, we
are accustomed to opposing analog and digital, the tag "Analogital" challenges this

division for the benefit of hybrid art practices; "Body Involvement" counteracts the normal use of a camera as marked by physical distance and negotiates the relation of sight to touch; "By Other Means" reminds us that cross-media processes are not a one-way street, from "older" to "newer"' media, but can also precede the other way round; "Lost & Found" reminds us further, through offering alternative approaches to media history, that the actual photographic and cinematic apparatuses, as we know them, are historical contingencies; "Material Agency" distrusts the assumption that only human agents are involved in the making of art by raising the question of materiality and its performative power; "Relics" demonstrates that even within media nearly exclusively devoted to recording and reproduction the objecthood of things can be a relevant issue; "Repurposing the Hardware" expresses the artist's refusal to capitulate to the increasing commodification of his or her tools; and finally, "Very Slow" serves as a corrective to the logic of consumer society and its tendency to speed everything up.

All the issues addressed by the tags of the database are crucially political. Since all technical media today are digitizable, the computer takes on the role of a convergence device. With its rise as a universal medium, our awareness of media differences gets lost along with the unique experiences that individual media are able to communicate. As far as the photochemical media of photography and film are concerned, they, suddenly reduced to data packages, suffer the loss of their material and haptic qualities (Jukić, Jutz, Lissel: 2016). Photography and film are mediums that are not confined to the making of fine art, but are produced industrially. Consequently, these art forms became dependent on industrial decisions. Retrograde art practices show how media convergence, with its tendency to merge all media into

one, leads to a reduction of choices and hence to an impoverishment of artistic skills

and practices (Dean/Cullinan 2011: 23). Artworks based on "retrograde technicity"

not only offer a way of interrogating the apparatus or *dispositif*, but also demonstrate

how media convergence can be counteracted, and how "analog living in the digital

world" is not only oriented towards the past but also – and especially – towards the

future.

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